



to Miss Spence Yarmouth
with the sincere regards of
the Author

July the first.

1842

THE

HUNGARIAN CASTLE.

THE
HUNGARIAN CASTLE.

BY
MISS PARDOE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CITY OF THE SULTAN," &c. &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLS.

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TO

MRS. EDWIN LEAF,

(*Of Berrymead Priory.*)

BENEATH WHOSE HOSPITABLE AND HAPPY ROOF

THESE VOLUMES

WERE PRINCIPALLY WRITTEN,

THEY ARE MOST AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY HER SINCERELY ATTACHED FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

LONDON, June, 1842.

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P R E F A C E.

IT has been with peculiar pleasure that I have once more made Hungary the scene of my literary labours ; and I venture to hope that the volumes which I now offer to the public may be found sufficiently truthful and characteristic to excite an interest in the romantic memories of a country essentially chivalric, and replete with adventure. I feel bound to offer my best thanks to those of my Magyar friends to whom I am indebted for the frame-work of my book ; particularly to the Baron Mednianski ; and to express a hope that the manner in which I have availed myself of their assistance, may be as satisfactory to them as it has been agreeable to myself.

LONDON, *June 1st, 1842.*

THE HUNGARIAN CASTLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE month of December, 183—, had set in with extreme rigour, and was only yet half spent, when a deep and persevering fall of snow compelled a numerous party, collected under the hospitable roof of an Hungarian magnate, whose stately castle occupied an elevated site on the confines of Transylvania, to prolong their visit far beyond its intended duration. The circumstance was not, however, calculated to excite serious regret, for the host had gathered together much of the beauty and chivalry of his high-hearted country : proud names and bright eyes were there ; and light spirits, and happy natures ; well disposed to scatter roses along the path of time, and to laugh at chance, as it usurped the control of their movements.

The castle crested a lofty mountain, covered on one side, for two-thirds of its height, with one of those primeval forests which give so much grandeur to the scenery of the country, and whose wild inhabitants affording alike sport to the noble, and profit to the peasant, had been, on the present occasion, the ostensible cause of assembling together the noble guests of the château: while immediately beneath it gleamed the now ice-choaked river, which during the summer months glided noiselessly along, heightening the fertility and beauty of the landscape. A lofty keep, strong ramparts, and a wide moat traversed by a drawbridge, now never raised, bore evidence of the original strength of the fortress; but in the present peaceful state of the country these protections were no longer needed, and the keep had been converted into an observatory; the ramparts had grown into terraces, gay with flowers, among which wandered bright forms, as sweet, and almost as fleeting as themselves; and the horn which awoke the echoes, and the hollow trampling of the steeds upon the drawbridge, only announced the departure or the return of the merry votaries of the chase.

All these objects, at the period when our tale commences, were alike buried under one vast fall of snow ; it hung in heavy flakes from the summit of the tower ; it rested on the frozen surface of the stream ; it formed fantastic wreaths along the ramparts, as if in emulation of the blossoms which were wont to grow there ; and it draped the dark pines of the mountain forest with a mantle so dazzling, that it made the dark branches which appeared at intervals, look black and charred, as though they had been smitten by lightning.

For the first few days the hunters pursued their sport, regardless of the rigour of the atmosphere ; while the ladies of the party, muffled to the throat in their rich furs, resolutely braved the cold in their turn, and made the echoes ring with their clear laughter as they traversed the ramparts ; though, at intervals, the report of rifles, and occasionally even the roaring of the wild boar or the bear, which was the object of the day's sport, reached their ears, and for a moment arrested the tide of their merriment. But when, after the lapse of a week, the fleecy storm still continued, accompanied by a keen and cutting wind, which seemed to freeze

the light snow into icicles as it fell, they reluctantly found themselves compelled to abandon all attempt at further sport without doors, and to seek in the sumptuous hospitality of their host for some alternative, which might enable them to endure their privation with philosophy.

The bright eyes and welcoming smiles which greeted their decision, promised well for its success ; and throughout the day the spacious halls of the castle rang with the sound of music and of mirth ; while the joyous dance, and the more anxious dice, filled up the later hours.

Never was a better assorted party—they had met together for enjoyment ; and although, perhaps, there were moments when a few of the youngest and the fairest sighed for the more courtly gaieties of Vienna, and remembered that the mad frolics of the carnival would soon commence, and that they had a long and a dreary journey before them, ere they could enter into the one, and participate in the other, these were but passing clouds, for they were also aware that a single day might effect a change ; nor was it altogether improbable that to a few of them, at least, that change, chance when it might, would come too soon.

Hundreds of pounds had changed hands ; as many measures had been trodden in the hall ; and both the gaming-table and the dance began to lose somewhat of their zest, when, on a more than usually stormy evening, when the blast was howling down the wide chimney, and an unwonted absence of energy pervaded the party, it was suggested by the young Baron Andrew Treplitz, that a circle should be made about the hearth, and that each in turn should be compelled to relate some tradition of his or her ancestors, leaving it to be decided by lot on whom the task should first devolve.

The proposition was acceded to at once ; for individual vanity, as well as family pride, was enlisted in the amusement ; and these are both powerful incentives ; while, as it was decided that no time should be lost, the same young noble made instant preparations for the lottery ; and in the meanwhile most of the party found occupation in securing places beside those of the circle in whom they felt the greatest interest. Nor was this very natural arrangement made without eliciting many arch glances and meaning smiles, which brought a shadow over proud brows, and a blush upon fair

cheeks ; but when at length it was completed, and that much which had hitherto seemed doubtful was now esteemed to be confirmed by the anxiety that had been displayed in so apparently simple a transaction, the fateful numbers were handed round by the projector of the scheme, and the lot declared to have fallen upon the nephew of the host, a fine youth, who was still a student at the Mining College of Schemnitz, and who in vain endeavoured to emancipate himself from the difficulty into which he had fallen.

All his objections having been overruled ; and even his indulgent uncle, of whom he was alike the darling and the heir, having abandoned him to his fate, or rather proudly urged him to fulfil it, in the fond hope that he would acquit himself with credit, he glanced, half playfully and half timidly, round the circle, and then said, modestly : “ If, indeed, my noble friends, you will admit no excuse, you must, at least, suffer me to obey only in part, and countenance an infringement of your rules in the person of the most insignificant member of the party ; for it would ill become me, who am as yet utterly unknown beyond my uncle’s territory, to

prate of the high deeds of my ancestors ; and thus, since I am bound in all things to submit to your good pleasure, in so far as I am capable of so doing, I will e'en recount to you a legend of our ancient city of Schemnitz, whose streets are built above a waste of wealth, and rest upon a mountain whose veins of silver have tempted man to emulate the gnome, and to dwell in a subterranean world, so gloomy and so vast that hope and health seem to have fled thence in despair, and to have resigned the fetid region to toil, and darkness, and disease.” This proposition was playfully put to the vote, and as all the ladies favoured the cause of the young miner, it was decided that he should be permitted to tell his tale, but that so pernicious an example should by no means be admitted as a precedent ; whereupon, the gay discussion having closed, and silence being once more restored, the youth commenced his narrative without further hesitation.

THE MINER'S DAUGHTER.

Years ago, so many that the date is lost, and we are indebted only to tradition for the tale—there lived in the ancient city of Schemnitz, a young

lady of immense wealth and large possessions. She was an orphan, without relatives; but of friends she had many, for gold can buy what the world calls friendship, as readily as it can purchase velvets and jewels. She had lovers, too, not a few; ardent, passionate lovers, who swore daily that poverty with her would be preferable to empire with any other of her sex; and the oath rose glibly to their lips, for nothing is more easy than to vow that which we are never likely to be called on to perform. Some of her suitors were nobly born, and had proud names; but they laid their family records at her feet, without reminding her that she could add nothing to their glory. And she *could* add nothing; for she had no mouldering parchments to show forth the antiquity of her lineage. When high birth and proud blood were mentioned before her, she only smiled; and although the lips were very beautiful that quivered with that smile, it yet seemed rather in mockery than mirth.

The first of her race who had been seen in Schemnitz, was her father; a dark stern man, coming, no one knew whence; to take posses-

sion of a mine near the *Rotherbrun*, which had long been deemed exhausted, and was consequently abandoned. None knew how he had obtained it; but as his title was undeniable, he at once took possession, and peopled it with workmen. For a time the miners toiled in vain: nothing but rock was splintered by the crow-bar, or riven by the blasting powder; and they became disheartened, and laboured less earnestly; but the eye of the master never clouded; his voice never changed: he walked through the unprolific galleries with a cold smile upon his lips, neither rebuking the idle, nor encouraging the diligent. Did an accident happen to the best workman in the mine, he offered neither pity nor assistance; he had no sympathy with suffering; or did he chance to come upon a group who were lightening their toil with jest or laughter, he did not seem to hear either: he had as little fellowship with joy.

Time passed, and he had already paid away large sums to the labourers in his mine, without seeming to care that he had only received stones in return; when, on one occasion, as he was passing among them, a sudden cry was heard; and a

miner, flinging down his tool, and springing over the piled-up masses of rock with which the ground was cumbered, placed in the hands of his master such a lump of pure and glittering silver as had never before been seen in those parts.

The almost frantic delight of the workman formed a strange contrast with the cold immobility of the individual to whom he thus brought the assurance of immense wealth; for while the other miners, who had been within hearing of the joyful cry, crowded in glad excitement about their lord, he calmly fondled the precious mass as he would have caressed a petted animal, and muttered beneath his breath: “Ha! ha! thou art come at last. I have watched and waited, waited and watched; and thou art come at last. ‘Tis well—’tis well; only a year of life exhausted in the vigil, and I have my reward.” As he ceased speaking, he thrust the ore into his bosom, gathered his mantle about him, and strode out of the mine.

But from that day his mood was wholly changed: he abandoned his home, a cheerful house on the hill-side, nestled among vineyards and acacia trees, where the sunshine and shadows chased each other

throughout the long summer day, and whence he could look around upon the tall mountains and the pleasant valley, and hear the cheerful bells of the neighbouring convents as they rang to prayer. His heart was in the mine : he saw no beauty in the face of nature ; he heard no harmony in the leafy woods ; he felt no happiness in human contact : his soul, if soul he had, was in his silver ; and each morning, ere the sun had risen, he came, with his motherless child in his hand, and plunged into the recesses of the mine.

What a fair child it was ! A lovely girl, with deep blue eyes, that looked purple when she laughed or wept, and hair as black as night, falling in waving tresses over a brow of ivory. It was a strange life for such a fairy creature ; and she soon ceased to laugh : it seemed as though she felt that mirth was a thing of upper earth, the offspring of the bright sky and the painted flowers ; and that its voice could not ring out among the dark galleries of the mine where she now wandered. She forgot, too, the sports and toys of the world above her, and made companionship with the quaint and mystic masses by which she was surrounded ; and held

her court by lamp-light alone, in some deep recess, where the ore flashed in the blaze, and the crystals fringed her palace-roof with jewels: and many voices answered her when she spoke, for the echoes were greedy of her silvery accents, and carried them away in soft whispers, to which she listened in her innocent earnestness, until they died gradually into silence. She loved the rushing of the waters, as they hurried through the subterranean; they were her music: a melody made for her without hands; and she wept sometimes as she listened to it, though she knew not why: but no feeling of terror ever came upon her in these dim solitudes; and she knew them all, and could wander alone among them without one misgiving: nor was it seldom that her quick perception governed the toils of the miners, for her young eye caught every indication of treasure; and when the blast followed her beckon, the ore was laid bare as surely as that the rock was rent asunder.

Those were her moments of transport; the powder had opened for her another glittering palace; and it was strange to see the wild beautiful creature leaping over the fallen masses, and earnestly scan-

ning the aspect of her new retreat. Her father loved her well in these moods, and encouraged her to trace out the veins of ore, and to indicate their direction; while he hurried, restless and exacting, from group to group of his panting labourers, urging them to yet greater exertion, rebuking them with their want of zeal, or taunting them with their feebleness. Wealth fell around him, as the autumnal leaves fall around the trees of the forest; but his cry was still “More! more!”

And thus he lived on until his daughter grew to womanhood; beautiful, very beautiful; but strange, and shy, and wayward; knowing nothing of the world, save that her father loathed it; and loving the dim mysterious silence of her early haunts far better than the fair and fertile earth above them.

And now a change again passed over her father's fortunes. The mine became once more sterile as suddenly as it had yielded wealth. For a time he persisted in believing that its barrenness was merely temporary; but at length the truth grew upon him that he had now reached the climax of his prosperity; and reluctantly he discharged his miners, and abandoned all further hope.

Went he back to the world with the countless riches which he had amassed? Did he draw down upon himself the envy of the poor, and the indignation of the proud, by the gaud and glitter of lightly-lavished wealth? Not so. Did he fling from him the trammels of vanity and sin, and render his past avarice a virtue, by founding monasteries and endowing hospitals with his gold, while he himself walked among the crowd in humility of spirit, and humbleness of heart? Again, not so. Did he become ambitious, and seek rank and titles at the hand of his sovereign, to be paid with usury, and upheld with pomp? Or did he suddenly feel a spirit of enterprise stir within him, and people the sea with merchant-vessels, and the storehouses with goods? False guesses all. He returned to his joyless home, with his motherless child, and leading her to a subterraneous chamber beneath the hall, pointed out to her the ponderous chests which filled it from floor to ceiling :—

“ It is yours—this wealth bought at a price which has no name;” he said gloomily, as he ground his teeth against each other: “ Yours, all yours—you have neither kinsman nor guardian to

dispute your claim ; of that, at least, I have been careful." And the look which he cast upon the maiden told dark tales of the past ; but she heeded it not : she was marvelling within herself whether this piled-up wealth would suffice to buy back the haunts from which she had been suddenly shut out ; and as her father ceased speaking, she ventured the enquiry.

" Poor fool !" said the man of mystery, as he smoothed back her flowing hair and looked into her deep eyes ; " thou hast many and strange lessons to learn in this world which thou art now about to enter ; but it is a generous task-mistress to those who can purchase its love with wealth. Use it, child ; use it unsparingly—put thy foot upon its neck ; it will not heed the indignity, if there be but gold in the hand stretched out to raise it up again. Make it minister to thy pleasures ; it will wear the yoke of servitude meekly, if the metal of which thou hast wrought it be only precious. It will laugh or weep with thee—make thy wrong right, and thy crooked path straight. The world is a vast citadel, strongly garrisoned against the poor ; but thou hast here a key which will command its gates, be they numerous as they may. Thou

canst buy all, child, *all!* Thou wilt die loved, honoured, and happy: for love, honour, and happiness, as the world read them, have each their price; and thou hast wherewithal to pay it. Thou wilt have nobles at thy feet—*thou*, who hast not even a name; for passion is bought and sold like food among thy fellows—friends, loving friends, who will borrow thy gold, and forget to pay it back—that is *their* price—companions who will riot upon thy substance, make music in thy halls, and feasting in thy bower chamber; drive thy chariots through the gaping streets, and thy horses along the yawning precipices—all in their love for thee—flatterers, who will tell thee of thy beauty, and sing its praise for the poor guerdon of the jewel with which thou hast adorned it—that is *their* inspiration—and vassals who will do thy bidding, and bow before thee with even more reverence than they bow before some pictured shrine, while they repay themselves for the humiliation by spoiling thee of all on which they can lay a hand greedy of gain—again, 'tis their vocation—And dost thou talk of buying back a few poor fathoms of dark and sterile rock, when thou hast power to purchase all these? Thou

makest me merry, child!" and he laughed: but even the maiden, well used as she was to his dark and wayward temper, started from beside him as that unholy laughter fell upon her ear.

They left the vault together, and the man of bitterness shut himself into his chamber, and forbade all intrusion. For three days they obeyed his bidding, for he ill brooked opposition to his will; but on the fourth day the maiden began to fear she knew not what; and she took up her station beside his door, and craved admittance.

She asked in vain, for there was no reply; and maddened by terror, she lost all apprehension of his displeasure, and commanded that an entrance should be forced. A few stout blows sufficed—the door fell back, and she stepped across the threshold, only to find herself alone. There remained no trace of him whom she had called her father; she shrieked out his name, and the echoes of the wide and desolate chamber gave her back her scream; she flung herself wildly upon her knees and wept, but her tears availed not—she never saw him more.

Gradually her grief subsided; and she became curious to wander over the wide earth that was

spread out before her windows, and to explore the depths of the vast forests that clothed the mountains, and seemed to prop the clouds—and there were none to control her will. It was autumn—glorious, golden autumn—when the woods seemed to rival the jewel-mines beneath them, and to borrow for a season the treasures of another hemisphere; and thitherward she turned. She had no sympathy with the garish sun ; she loved the dim, mysterious, deserted depths of the silent woods ; and there she wandered for hours, until she began to love them as she had loved the dark subterranean solitudes of her girlhood.

But the fame of her great wealth had been bruited abroad, and the prophecy of her father began to work ; she was never suffered to be alone beneath her own roof ; every hand was extended to her in fellowship ; every eye beamed on her with smiles. At first she shrank back, terrified, from the garrulous crowd ; but soon she learnt to love the adulation which she met, and ere very long to exact it. She smiled as her suitors whispered pleasant flatteries, and stole to her mirror to assure herself that she deserved them all. Then came

the vanity of dress; and she covered herself with jewels, and robes of the most costly stuffs. Revelry was loud beneath her roof; and her will was the law before which all gave way, delighted to do her homage. She seemed to live a charmed existence; but there were moments when she still wandered away in very weariness to the recesses of the mountain woods. It was in one of these silent nooks, deep in the heart of the leafy solitude, that she was on one occasion startled by the sight of a human being stretched at the foot of a tall elm. It was the only time that she had encountered any living thing in that retreat, save the timid hare disturbed by her own footsteps, or the graceful fawn gamboling beside its dam; and her first impulse was to fly; but the stranger stirred not a limb, and curiosity soon superseding terror, she advanced, slowly and cautiously, within a few paces of his resting-place.

It was a picturesque figure on which she looked. It should have been a hunter, for there lay his spear and his rifle close beside him; but it might be a mountain robber, for in his belt he carried a pair of Turkish pistols and a dagger, which even in sleep he clutched, as if ready to defend himself

against attack. His dress, too, might serve either the one or the other, but was somewhat too costly for either. He wore a heron plume in his embroidered cap, secured by a large opal ; his girdle was a scarf of crimson silk, fringed at the ends with silver ; and his velvet coat, edged with sable, was richly laced with gold.

The lady, as she leant towards him, remembered her crowd of lovers, and passed them in review one by one ; and her heart beat quick as she felt that this sleeping stranger was already more dear to her than any among them. She approached yet nearer ; she could see the breath escape from between his parted lips, and an occasional sigh heave his broad bosom ; she knew not why she did so, but she echoed each as she marked it. She wished that he would awake, and yet she feared his waking ; and at length she unclasped from her wrist a costly bracelet, and laying it beside him, cautiously concealed herself among the underwood.

Her tread, light as it was, disturbed the rest of the sleeper, and he sprang suddenly from the earth with his naked dagger in his hand, and glared around him, in search of the intruder ; but, after a

moment's survey, he smiled scornfully, as though in contempt of his own terror, and stooped to gather up his weapons. Beside them lay the bracelet. He started as he saw it, and eagerly raised it from the earth. "I thought that my practised ear could not have been deceived!" he murmured; "The ransom is already paid; but where is the prisoner? I would wager a thousand ducats that she is not far off. By St. Hubert, I shall have a merry morning's hunting, or my star is an unlucky one indeed."

The pursuer was more subtle than the pursued; an involuntary movement betrayed the hiding-place of the lady; and ere ten minutes had elapsed she was standing beside her captor, under the same tree beneath which his hunting-weapons were still lying.

And who was her captor? To him *she* was no mystery; he knew her as he drew her forth from her retreat; and vague and brilliant hopes at once crowded across his brain. But who was he?

"Fear me not, lady;" he said blandly, as he threw off his furred and embroidered habit, in order to form a seat for her beneath the branches,

while he stood before her in a tight hunting-vest of chamois-leather : “ Fear me not ; one glance at your beauty has made me your slave for ever. You ask me who I am ; I am your vassal, ready to do willing homage, and good service, when need is.”

“ But your name ? ”—urged the lady.

The stranger smiled as he raised her jewelled hand to his lips : “ What care you for a name ? I will not ask you for yours.”

A deep flush passed over the brow and bosom of the maiden, and something like a tear rose to her eye : but her pride was quenched ; and though she felt the taunt, she sought not to resent it.

“ You are right : ” she said meekly ; “ names avail little : but you will surely tell me something of your history.”

“ Would you ask me how many deer I have slaughtered, and how many masses I have said since the last festival of St. Stephen ? ” was the laughing rejoinder ; “ for I have no other tale to tell. My history will commence from the moment when I gathered up this precious bracelet.” And he drew it out from his bosom, and pressed it to his lips.

And thus in mystery she learned to love him ;

and then he told her all. He was a man of violence and rapine, and his life was forfeited to the law; the wild-wood was his home, and robbers were his associates; but she shrank not at the tale; to her the laws were nothing, while he was all in all; and she loved him the more that, like her, he hated the world, and that none must know his retreat save her, and those who shared it. Once they talked of securing her gold, and flying to another land; but his companions vowed themselves to betray him should he attempt it: for her wealth secured the prosperity of the band; who, freed from the necessity of plunder, passed their time in hunting, or in idling among the shadows of the forest.

But winter came at length; and although the robbers could secure themselves among the caverns of the mountain, the lady could no longer wander forth to meet her lover, as she had been wont to do; and thus, rendered incautious by long security, he stole to her dwelling to pass the hours beside her which had flown so swiftly among the autumnal woods.

The tradition tells that he was a man of most surpassing beauty—tall, and strong, and stately; and once seen, more surely recognized than other men;

and thus, indeed, it proved ; for ere long he was seen descending the mountain, and an ambush was formed to take him as he returned to his forest-faithless. Many were employed in his capture, for his prowess was a proverb in the country ; and he sold his liberty dearly, and verified all the tales that had been whispered of him ; he flung off three or four of his captors, and even dreamt of escape ; but numbers gathered about him on all sides, and, with a bursting heart, he felt at length that all was lost.

Great was the exultation of the crowd who dragged him back, bound and bleeding, into the city. “ To the gibbet ! To the gibbet !” was the cry of the citizens, who had long lived in terror of this formidable mountain robber ; and “ To the gibbet !” echoed back the voices of the magistrates, by whom his condemnation had long before been formally pronounced.

Just beyond the city rises a small hill ; and here, with the cruel haste of blood-demanding zeal, busy hands soon erected the instrument of death ; and the redoubted robber-chief had not quitted the bower-chamber of the lady two short hours, ere his body

was swinging in the wind from the summit of that fatal hill.

Words cannot paint the horror of the maiden when she learnt the fate of her lover. She would have given all her hoarded gold to have seen him once again beside her; but even her riches failed her here. She cast her mantle about her, and hurried to the council-chamber; the crowd gave way before her, for her wild air and frantic gestures inspired them with pity and with awe. The court had met, and each rose as the wealthy heiress of uncounted treasures rushed into the midst of them.

"I come not to ask for mercy;" she gasped out, as she reached the centre of the floor; "not for mercy, for the deed of blood is done. You have stopped the pulsations of the noblest heart that ever beat within a human breast. I would have ransomed him with my whole wealth, and thanked you that you sold his life so cheap. But now I come only to ask you to give up to me the poor shrine of the quenched spirit, that I may lay it low with reverence; and the foul gibbet where it has suffered contumely, that I may wreak the ven-

geance I cannot work elsewhere, upon the senseless wood. You hesitate! I do not ask for alms of the proud city—I am no pauper to pay back with blessings the charity I seek; therein I am indeed a beggar—I have no blessing to offer you, but gold—gold: and yet not gold; it would but be the price of blood, and bring a curse upon the hand that dealt it out. Grant me the boon I seek, and for the poor frail tenement of wood, and the still frailer body that it bears, I'll pay you thus: upon that very spot, that spot accursed, I'll build a castle, turreted and strong, meet to endure for centuries. I'll dwell there, *there*, where he died; but when I join him in the grave, I'll leave it as a token to the city—a stern remembrancer of iron justice. Time wears, and he is still unsepulchred. Is my boon granted?"

A short delay sufficed the men of power: another gibbet could be raised upon another hill; and they were bound to accept an offer which enriched the city. The lady bore away her dead, and buried him beneath the same tall elm where she had met him first; and the priests chaunted a solemn requiem over his woodland grave, for every prayer

had been paid with gold, and then they left him in the dim solitude which he had loved in life.

For a whole year the lady thought but of the castle which she had sworn to build ; and the work went on until it was accomplished. Four turrets flanked it, whose pointed roofs seemed to cut through the blue expanse of heaven ; and from the midst rose a tower which overlooked the valley, and gave broad views of the mighty mountains that hemmed it in. The last stone was laid ; the workmen departed, and the lady was left alone. Then she threw off her mourning garments, and put jewels in her hair, and on her bosom ; and filled her halls with song, and feast, and revelry. Again she listened to other lovers ; and made merry with the flatterers and the sycophants who crowded about her path. The wine flowed freely at her board, as the blood of the Turk in battle ; and the dice were busy in her halls, transferring broad lands and stately castles from one owner to another. One guest only she refused : no priest ever passed her threshold : she lived amid riot, and misrule, and scorned the whispers of the wise, and the avoidance of the worthy.

It chanced that once when she had wandered forth alone, and was midway of the narrow bridge across the river Gran, on her return to her home, a monk, a pilgrim and a stranger, who did not know of whom he asked an alms, nor upon whom he invoked a blessing, besought her to have pity on him. The voice of supplication was new to her ear, for the wretched of the neighbourhood had long ceased to sue to her ; and the novelty of the circumstance made her pause in order to grant the request ; when in drawing off her glove to repay his prayer with gold, a ring which she had long worn upon her finger fell into the rapid current of the river.

A curse rose to her lip—a deep and bitter curse. *The dead* had placed that ring upon her hand, and even amid the evil life she lived, she loved his memory still. The curse was dark, and the monk shuddered as it met his ear ; he feared not its effect, but his heart revolted at its injustice. “The malison of the wicked works no evil ;” he said calmly, as he turned away. “My days are reckoned, and dark words will not shorten them ; but for you, proud lady, take back my prophecy, that

when again that fatal ring is found, you will become as poor, and far more wretched than myself."

"When that ring is found;" echoed the lady scornfully, as she glanced over the parapet into the eddying current beneath her; "when that ring is found, I will sue to thee, graybeard, for my bread, as thou hast this day sued to me!"

The monk shook his head in silence and in sorrow, and turned away; and, despite her scorn, the lady felt, as he disappeared, that a weight had fallen upon her spirit which foreboded evil. Alas! she sought not to avert it by prayer or almsgiving; but she plunged deeper and deeper into the deadly vortex of vanity and vice, and sought to silence the small voice that whispered to her in the night-watches, by clamour, and idle revelry.

Her suitors became more urgent, for they felt that even her wealth, great as it was, must ultimately melt away amid the reckless profusion in which she lived; and that if they would profit by what still remained from the wreck, they must secure it quickly; but their flatteries had grown stale upon her ear, and she only received them as

the homage that was her due, not as sweet incense by which her favour was to be propitiated. The whole tribe of lovers were in despair ; she could not be won as other women were, by gauds and toys, for what could they give her which her gold could not purchase ? And thus she lived on, amid a crowd of worshippers, as cold and as unmoved as though the words of passion had never met her ear.

Sometimes she disappeared from among them ; and those who sought her through the castle found her not ; and in those moments the voice of blame was loud against her from the very lips which but an hour ago had been steeped in adulation. They drank the wines which were poured forth by her attendants, feasted upon the dainties that crowded her board, trampled under foot the carpets of cunning tapestry work, and clothed themselves in the rich furs that were scattered over the apartments ; and made merry amid their feasting and their debauch, with the name and fame of her to whom they owed it all.

And where was she during those hours of unholy revel ? In the dark forest, beneath the elm-tree, sitting upon the grave of her dead lover, and

vowing vengeance, a woman's impotent vengeance, against all human nature for his sake.

One day, as she reached the spot of her solitary hauntings, she saw a dark substance stretched upon the grave ; and as she advanced, a dog lifted its head from the earth, and gave out a long low howl, which seemed almost human. A chill fell on the heart of the lady, and she hesitated to advance ; but the animal had again dropped its head languidly upon the grave, and remained motionless.

"An outcast like myself;" murmured the lady ; "who has here found a resting-place. Poor beast ! why should I fear it?" and she resolutely shook off her first feeling of apprehension, and having reached the grave, took her accustomed seat beside it, and began, as was her wont, to clear it of the fallen leaves that were strewn about it. As her hand passed to and fro, it occasionally came in contact with the dog, who watched her every motion with a cold eye, but stirred not from its station ; and absorbed in her own thoughts, she soon became heedless, and almost unconscious of its presence ; and was startled when, as she rose at

length to depart, the dog rose also, and having licked her hand, prepared to bear her company.

“ Strange !” said the lady, as she stooped to caress the animal, and met its blank eye fixed on hers : “ can it be that thou knowest that all I ever loved lies here, and that thou wilt henceforth become the companion of my watchings, and the friend of my solitude ? Or art thou his spirit, wandering in another form over the earth, from which thou wert so ruthlessly cast out ? Be it as it may, thou art most welcome. Henceforward we part no more.”

The dog uttered another long low howl, as if to ratify the compact ; and again, for a brief moment, the heart of the lady quailed within her ; but she glanced towards the grave, and the animal turned and looked upon it also, and the spirit of the unhappy one was thralled ; so she slowly took the road back to her dwelling, and her new companion followed close behind her.

Lights were in every casement of the castle where the dark gibbet had once stood ; music pealed from the open windows on the very spot where the death-sob had been heard so lately ;

and as they mounted the steep ascent, and the revelry grew louder, the dog sent forth another howl, that was heard above it like the cry of an accusing spirit.

Wheresoever she moved after that day, the dog was ever on her path ; by night it slept upon the threshold of her chamber ; when she ate it fed from her hand ; and when she walked forth it was her constant companion. The other animals of its kind, with which it occasionally came in contact, fled at its approach ; and soon dark whispers were bruited abroad, wherein the name of the lady was coupled with foul rumours and supernatural suspicions ; but she dreamt not of this, and still pursued her evil way without a care, or a foreboding for the future.

At length arrived the anniversary of the day on which she had laid the first stone of the castle, a building based on blood, and profaned by evil occupation ; and on this occasion she had decided to hold a festival, where every dainty which gold could purchase, and every folly that luxury could invent, should make it the marvel and the story of the district. East, west, north, and south, hurried

her hired messengers ; they brought her grapes from Tokay, the costly fruit which yields the precious wine, whose drops are health ; game from the mountain forests of the stately Szitna ; and fish from the imperial Donau ; the guests ate from dishes of silver, and drank from cups of gold ; the hireling minstrels sang the praises and the delights of wealth ; the dancers wore garlands of flowers and robes of tissue ; and the feast went on, as though the earth had been made for the sensualist and the idler ; while the lady sat at the head of her sumptuous board on a gilded chair, covered with crimson velvet, almost extinguishing the thousand lamps of her stately hall with the blaze of her unnumbered jewels ; making her frown law, and her smile fortune ; when, borne by four serving men in scarlet vestments richly fringed, a silver salver of huge dimensions was placed before her, and on it lay a sturgeon, so large in size, that no dish throughout the castle kitchen could contain it. The Donau had given up its kingly tenant, and many a gibe and jest passed among the guests, as they laughed over the subservency of the elements to the power of gold. A knife was handed to the lady, in order that she

might give the first stab to the river monster ; and as her delicate fingers closed over its hilt, she rose from her seat, to plunge the pointed blade deep into the mighty fish.

It sunk even to the hilt she held, and it required all her strength to draw it back ; and then, threaded on the steel which had been driven into the midst of the fatal circle, there hung the ring which had been lost to her, with a curse, embittered to her by a dark prophecy, and restored to her by a miracle. As in the first impulse of her terrified surprise she flung it from her, and sank back in her seat, the dog, who was near her, howled its long howl that echoed through the hall ; and then he gathered it up in his mouth, laid it upon her lap, and crouched down on the floor beside her.

The guests looked on in wonder ; when suddenly, a peasant rushed into the hall. Her mountain-home, that in which she had dwelt with her father, was in flames. "Let it burn ;" she said gloomily : "'tis the beginning of the prophecy."

On the morrow there was a frightful storm ; it hurried along the crests of the mountains, swept

over the city hastily, as though its errand was not there, and burst above the vineyards of the lady. The wild boar and the bear devastated her corn lands; the river overflowed its banks, and inundated her gardens and her orchards; an earthquake yawned beneath the hill, and buried her chests of treasure; her flatterers mocked her with false sympathy; her friends abandoned her, because they could not look upon her grief; her servants stripped her of the rich garnishing of her pleasant walls to pay themselves for their past services; her lovers left her to urge a more prosperous suit; and of all whom she had feasted and caressed, ere many weeks had passed, not one remained beside her in her desolate home, save the mysterious dog, with his cold eye and his melancholy howl.

Hunger and thirst grew upon her to madness, but she had been stripped of all, and had not wherewithal to satisfy them. “ My father knew not this world at which he scoffed;” she murmured to herself, as she sank down fainting upon the marble pavement of her deserted hall: “ he told me that I should die loved, honoured, and happy. I die shunned, reviled, and wretched; without a friend,

without a hope, without a name. Fool that I have been; I am now wise too late."

Tears, the most bitter that she had ever shed, streamed down her pallid cheeks; sobs rent her labouring bosom; and for the first time she felt that she was mortal.

A heavy tread aroused her from her reverie. The dog gave out a long howl, and crawled, with his belly upon the earth, to nestle in her bosom. She looked up, and saw the same monk whom she had cursed upon the bridge, with his gray beard and travel-soiled garments, leaning over her.

"Is there yet hope, my daughter?" he asked, in a low, gentle voice; "hath adversity done its work, and taught thee more holy thoughts? Even at the eleventh hour wilt thou listen to the accents which warn thee?"

And she was about to say, "I will"—when the dog crouched yet more closely against her, and her words were arrested in the utterance; but she had still strength to murmur; "Give me bread!" and to devour the wretched crust which her companion drew from his wallet, as though it had been the veriest dainty ever served at a king's table.

Help came, nevertheless, too late; for though the food passed her lips, she wanted strength to swallow it; and thus she died, hungered, thirsting, and obdurate! And when they sought to cover her with the consecrated earth, a dog leapt upon her coffin, and scratched aside the soil. A bystander at length smote him with his staff, and he fell upon the coffin; but when they would have cast him thence, his weight overtaxed their power, and they could not lift him out of the grave; so they flung the earth above him as he lay, and a white sulphurous smoke curled up as each portion of the soil fell into the pit. They who filled it prayed, as they did so, to be protected against the power of the Evil One; and their prayers were heard; and thus, all that now remains at Schemnitz to recal the memory of the Miner's Daughter are the mouldering remains of the Young Lady's Castle.

CHAPTER II.

THE auditors of the young miner were not stern critics ; and they one and all congratulated him on his legend, which, wild as it was, afforded a glimpse of the mysterious region of which most of them had heard so much, and knew so little. Nor was it surprising that, when he had believed that his task was ended, he should find himself overwhelmed with questions, especially by his lady-listeners, who were never weary of enquiring into the possibility, or even probability, of exploring the subterranean wonders amid which he had laid the early scene of his story ; nor of listening to his animated account of the great mine of Backerstollen, which forms the first of a series, extending for fifty leagues through the heart of the Carpathians, gallery above gallery, and range above range.

Nor was the animated youth loth to reply to the lovely lips and bright eyes by which he was questioned ; for it was flattering thus to be made, for a

time, the centre of so bright a circle, and the object of so general an interest; and it, moreover, gladdened him to perceive the gratification of his venerable uncle, who, although he had made no comment on a tale much too romantic and impossible for his matured tastes, had, nevertheless, appreciated the satisfaction of his guests, and the success of his young relative.

And he had much to tell, not only of the dim mines themselves, but also of they who wrought there; of their wild superstitions, their religious enthusiasm, and their stern endurance. He described the charms by which they sought to discover the rich veins of ore, and in which, despite their frequent failures, they did not the less implicitly believe as their fathers had believed before them; and his strange tales were so new and so exciting to his courtly auditors, few of whom had even visited the region of which he spoke, that another hour flew by unheeded ere any seemed to remember that they had worn far into the night.

The venerable host was the first to make the discovery; and while the remainder of the party were still deep in the mysteries of their subject, he

silently rose, and lifting from a silken divan a guitar that was resting upon its cushions, he suggested that some fair lady should dispel, by the sound of music, the gloomy effects of his nephew's dreary narrations. The wish was complied with ; and the merry dance having succeeded to the cheerful song, his guests separated for the night, having previously congratulated the individual upon whom had devolved the task of following up their newly-discovered amusement, on the time which he had before him to renew his memories, and to select his subject ; while it was unanimously agreed that on the morrow, the legends should be introduced immediately after the evening meal, in order that none of the party should be emancipated from the necessity of contributing their share of entertainment by the return of fine weather, and the consequent dispersion of the guests.

There were a few of these, however, who endeavoured to negative the arrangement, in the hope of an escape ; for there are many persons in the world who find it much more easy to pride themselves upon their antiquity of race, and the exploits of their forefathers, than to shew cause for doing

so ; and who infinitely prefer referring the curious to their family archives, to becoming themselves their chroniclers ; and accordingly the final “good night” had no sooner been exchanged, than many a heavy curtain was drawn back from the casements of the sleeping chamber, to ascertain the state of the atmosphere. Nothing, however, could be more unpropitious to the hopes of the indolent ; for the sky was one wide stretch of blue overhead, through which the bright stars were twinkling their keen little eyes, as though they were making merry at the cold white world which lay spread out beneath them : while on the edge of the horizon, on every side, this azure dome seemed to rest on masses of dun and blueish vapours, piled one over the other, and giving evidence that the fleecy storm had subsided for a time only in caprice ; and that material still remained collected, which would enable the snow-king to continue his aggressions for another week to come, should he so will it.

And will it he did, for on the following morning the flakes were again flying fast and light as a lady’s fancies ; and the huntsmen and vassals brought in wondrous tales of the depth of the snow-drifts, and

the state of the mountain paths ; so the gentlemen betook themselves to the stables to see whether their gallant horses chafed under their inaction as greatly as they did themselves, and in many instances found the quadruped much the more reasonable animal of the two ; and then they sauntered to the kennels, and commented on the noble wolf-hounds, whose deep baying makes brave music to the ear of the hunter ; toyed for awhile with the falcons ; and ultimately collected round the tables in an inner saloon, where deep play, that favourite and never-failing resource of a German or Hungarian, drove the hours before it with a speed which made them for a time forget that they were snowed up in a mountain castle, in the depth of winter.

These same tables, however, exciting as they were to the male portion of the party, were by no means so popular with the fairer guests ; for it is one of the beautiful features of a German lady, that she never engages in any game of chance ; and thus the time which was consumed by their cavaliers in cards and dice, was spent by them at their embroidery frames, over the tales and poems of the season, or in the enjoyment of music.

Thus passed the day ; but the evening meal had no sooner terminated than the circle of the previous evening was re-formed, and the handsome matron who was to be their next chronicler, and towards whom all eyes were directed, answered the appeal by saying ; “ You are all of you aware that I am connected by marriage with the noble family of Thurzo ; and although the tale which I am about to tell reflects but little honour on the ancestor of my husband, it is nevertheless too remarkable a tradition, and, moreover, too widely diffused throughout the province where the event took place, for me to withhold it—listen then——”

THE HAUNTED CASTLE OF HRISCO.

The valley of the Waag is one of the most beautiful portions of Hungary. It is traversed by a sparkling river, which is hemmed in by the lower range of the Carpathians ; and, nestling beneath these, by a line of minor hills, dense with vegetation ; the rocky outline of the mountain chain, dotted here and there with ruined fortresses and strongholds, forming a bold contrast to the thickly-wooded and well-cultivated heights within their arid belt.

Every league along which the traveller advances, varies the landscape, only to produce new beauties. Mountain rills glance among the rich crops; clumps of forest trees, principally elms and beeches, give a softened feature to the scene; and here and there, on some smoothly-moulded acclivity, sweeping downward to the river, stands a stately modern château, among which that of the Eudödi family gleams out grandly in the sunshine, backed by stately woods, and gay with statued terraces.

It would probably be impossible to traverse any country which could afford within the same limits, a similar variety of startling scenic effects. Here, all is clear, and bright, and gay in its rich greenery, looking as though it had just sprung freshly from the hand of nature; there, all is dim, mysterious, and wild, seeming like the ghostly visions of past centuries, keeping watch over the bloom and beauty of the present.

One of the most remarkable portions of the province has for its centre the crumbling and blackened castle of Hrisco; built on the very summit of a bare and precipitous rock, whose jagged outline, bristling with pointed masses, seems as though

it might have defied the power of man to cumber it with his own creations. The fortress is composed of those huge stones which constitute the idea of cyclopedean architecture ; and these are so craftily apportioned, as to unite together the rude projections of the rock itself, and to compel it to subser-
viency with the general design of the pile, which, although not of very vast interior dimensions, is so blent with the inequalities of the mountain, that the eye has difficulty in ascertaining its exact extent, and computes it at far more than its actual size. Where one spike of rock towered towards the sky, a second was erected of rude masonry to complete the outline ; and thus, in like manner, natural caverns and chasms were converted into dungeons, and every means adopted to decrease the Hercu-
lean, and, as it would seem, almost impossible labour, of conveying the huge masses of stone em-
ployed in the building, to the summit of the difficult acclivity.

For the last three centuries it has been a dark, gaunt, and shapeless ruin ; but it moulders away in its strong stateliness, as an aged warrior wastes beneath his armour, frowning defiance to the last.

Its reported occupancy is worthy of its gloomy appearance ; for the Castle of Hrisco has the reputation of being peopled with evil spirits. Shapes of foul seeming, such as make night hideous, and scare the silence of the stars with wild and terrible voices ! Witches, and hags, and those deformed and hateful things which have their home in the hearts of the rocks whose veins are ore ; and vampires, who hold their hellish revels in churchyards, and sap the life-blood of youth and beauty, when the grave fails to yield a banquet ; and, perhaps still worse, monsters half men, half beasts, with the base passions of both natures, and a hatred to all the bright things of this fair world, beneath whose sunshine they dare not show themselves.

Such are said, and firmly believed throughout the district, to be the tenants of Hrisco ; nor is there wanting the evidence of many yet alive, who, refusing to place credence in the marvellous tales of their ancestors, and tempted by the traditions of buried treasure which had been handed down from father to son, when the history of the ruined castle became the theme of the winter's hearth, ventured there in search of wealth, and were grievously tor-

mented, terrified, and even beaten and wounded, by the demoniac guardians of the place.

About the period when the royal race of the Jagellons became extinct, and the Turks overran a great portion of the country, the fortress of Hrisco was the stronghold of the knights of Tahar; and the representative of the family, a brave Baron, rich in all worldly gear to grace his station, the husband of a fair and noble lady, and the father of four lovely sons.

But it seemed as though the breath of the Infidel invaders had shed its baneful pollution over the castle of Hrisco; for the Baron had scarcely buckled on his armour, to join the gallant army of his countrymen, who were about to dispute with them, inch by inch, the soil which they had desecrated by their sway, when his elder boy sickened; and even as the father stood beside his couch, striving to cheer the mother's heart with hope, he stretched out his young arms, and died.

It was indeed a pang to that fond mother; for she had wedded the lord of Hrisco, in obedience to the behest of a stern father, and to her those noble boys had been all she loved on earth; and there lay

her first-born, in the bloom of his young beauty—dead!

At first she would not believe it; and bade him answer her when she called upon his name, and return the clasp she laid upon his hand, and the kiss that she pressed upon his lips; and even although that hand and those lips grew marble cold as the hours wore on, she could not realise her bereavement; but chid those who came on tiptoe into the chamber to stretch his fair round limbs for the burial, and to strew scented herbs upon the floor.

At length they laid him in his grave; in a vault, hewn out of the living rock beneath the castle; and when the Baron sought his wife, to bid her farewell ere he departed to encounter the Infidels, he found her beside the coffin of her dead child, and they parted there; and the lady sat down again, without a tear or a sigh, and resumed her lonely watch.

She was summoned hastily thence: her younger boy had sickened—her blooming babe, whose very existence was sport; and whose beauty was like that of the flowers amid which he spent his life. She rushed to his side, and there he lay, parched

with fever, peevish with thirst, impatient from pain. The dead one was forgotten : and thenceforward the pale and tearless mother stirred not from the couch of her suffering infant. Ere long a change came over his malady, and he ceased to pine ; for his brain wandered, and visions of bright fresh things grew upon him ; and as he lay upon that bed of death, he heard the singing of birds of bright plumage, such as came not to his own land ; and he sat beside running waters, that made music to the wild flowers upon their banks ; and he chased butterflies over the green sward ; and robbed the humming-bee of its luscious burthen ; and played with the stars as they floated upon the surface of a shallow stream, through which he waded to catch them ; and, amid these wild and beautiful phantasies he died, with a smile upon his lips, and his little fingers clutched firmly, to secure some fancied treasure.

Another, and yet another ; the last wild hope of the mother's heart, faded each in its turn ; and when the Baron returned, wounded and worsted from his enterprise, the castle-vault was peopled with youth and innocence, and he was a childless man.

No marvel that as he laid aside his armour, he

cared not that the deep injury which he had sustained from a Turkish lance should yield to the skill of his attendants ; nor did it. The anguish of his bereavement fevered his already heated blood ; recklessness augmented the evil ; and ere another month had waned, the lady of Hrisco followed once more to the death-chamber, and saw her lord laid to rest amid his children.

Grateful for her unceasing and unrepining obedience throughout the years of their ungenial marriage, the Baron bequeathed the castle of Hrisco, and its extensive dependencies, to his childless widow ; and the lady wandered alone, pale and silent, through the dreary pile, day after day, until two years of her bitter widowhood had worn away. And there were some who remembered what the bereaved Châtelaine had forgotten, and who began to estimate the value of a bride with such a dowry, and to deem that she had already given too much time to solitude and tears.

Then the steep ascent to the castle became crowded with many a gallant retinue ; and the horn of the warder echoed shrilly among the rocky peaks ; and the errand of all was the same—they came to woo the heiress of Hrisco ; but she heeded

them not; and count, baron, and chevalier, alike returned disappointed.

It was just at this period that the light of the reformed religion was beginning to penetrate into the land; and its mild and consoling tenets made their way, at once, to the spirit of the mourner of Hrisco. Nor did the cruel persecutions by which the new faith was met by the popish population and priesthood, tend to weaken her enthusiasm in its cause; but rather induced her to embrace the more readily a hope and a creed, for which she might, perhaps, be called upon to suffer.

The neighbouring castle of Zietawa belonged to the Baron Francis Thurzo, who had once been bishop of Neutra, but who had subsequently resigned his see, and embraced Lutheranism, of which he was one of the most able and zealous champions. Still in the prime of life, and eminently handsome, he had been lately widowed by the death of his wife, the beautiful Barbara Kostka; and during the period of his retirement at Zietawa, when the violence of his grief had abated, he began to consider the expediency of visiting the fortress of Hrisco, and endeavouring to cheer and comfort, by good

counsel and earnest consolation, the childless and suffering widow.

Thurzo was her first welcome visitor, for no word of love was on his lip, no thought of passion in his mind. Her junior by a score of weary years, she looked upon him as a son: and thus they poured out their mutual griefs, sure of a sympathising auditor; and the lady of Hrisco wept with the young widower the early fate of the lovely Barbara; and he, in his turn, stood beside the coffins of her children, and spoke to her of peace and hope.

The lordly possessions of Thurzo and Hrisco not only adjoined each other, but were so strangely interlaced and blended, that after the Count Francis had ridden for an hour over the land of the widow, he suddenly came upon a portion of his own estate; and this more than once ere his journey was completed. At first he thought of suggesting a mutual transfer, by which each might have a defined limit to their property; but the longer he dwelt upon the subject, the more he became aware of the extreme difficulty of such an arrangement, and consequently the more desirable it appeared; and out of a mere love of order, finally grew a project of ambition,

which soon became the day-dream of the young widower.

This project, which at first appeared even to himself wild, vague, and almost impossible, gradually assumed strength and form. It was no less than an union with the richly-endowed lady of Hrisco, the junction of whose wide lands with his own, would render him the wealthiest and most powerful noble of the province ; and although for a time the handsome and admired Count of Thurzo shrank from the idea of replacing his beautiful Barbara by so aged and grave a bride, a glance at the broad domain of Hrisco reconciled him to the sacrifice, and he resolved to pursue the adventure.

Accordingly his visits to the gloomy fortress, and its scarcely less gloomy mistress, became more frequent. He ceased to talk to her of the dead ; but carried with him news of the war, or the aristocratic gossip of the neighbouring nobles ; commended the fashion of her tapestry ; and gave her wise hints for the government of her numerous vassals, and the management of her teeming lands ; and, ere long, his counsel and support became so necessary to her, that more than once she dispatched a message to

Zeitawa to crave the presence of its lord, and his guidance in some difficult emergency.

The Count saw and felt his advantage ; but it was long ere he suffered the unsuspecting Châtelaine to understand his motives for a line of conduct, which she believed to grow out of a community of faith, and the accident of near neighbourhood. When, however, the fact became evident to her, although she could not but acknowledge to her own heart that the presence and support of Thurzo had become the one joy of her secluded life, she yet shrank in her turn from the idea of a second bridal. Hers had been a life of trial : unloved as a wife, bereaved as a mother, and sought only for her gold throughout her three long years of widowhood, she felt that care, as well as time, had been busy with her ; and that her faded features, changing hair, and attenuated form, were ill suited to match with the still fresh and manly graces of the Lord of Zeitawa.

Vainly did the thwarted and mortified Thurzo endeavour to combat this reasoning ; and, as he knelt at her feet, and kissed away the tears which fell thick and fast upon the hand he held, swear that he asked not a younger, or a fairer bride, than she

who thus resolutely negatived his suit. The lady remembered that even when she was young and beautiful—and she knew that she *had* been very beautiful—she had failed to win the heart of her wedded lord ; and that when her children died, the last link had been broken between them : and she asked herself what now would be her fate, should she suffer that which she held to be the generous and uncalculating attachment of such a man as Thurzo, to unite him to her in the decline of life and hope.

The answer was too plain to be evaded ; but the heart of the desolate woman had been awakened by his earnestness and devotion ; the ashes which had lain mouldering for long and bitter years, had been stirred once more into warmth ; and as the latent sparks were kindled, and she felt that it depended only upon herself not to sink into the grave unloving, and unloved, as she had lived ; in an evil hour, by permission of the sovereign, she adopted Francis Thurzo as her son, with free right to inherit all her vast possessions at her decease, should she so will it.

Poor human nature ! How fearfully does it deceive itself ! When the lady of Hrisco smilingly

affixed her signature to the deed which made the Count her heir, unless she afterwards saw cause to revoke the gift, she believed that she had secured to herself for the remainder of her life, the affectionate devotion of a lover, never fated to degenerate into a cold, sated, and indifferent husband.

As well might she have sought to bind the sunshine which was weaving a web of party-coloured tissue on the marble pavement of her castle-hall, as it penetrated through the stained glass of the high oriel window, with the chain which depended from her waist!

Meanwhile the health of the lady became renovated, as she ceased to brood over her griefs, and found occupation and delight in the contemplation and enjoyment of this new and voluntary tie; while Thurzo saw all his dreams of present aggrandisement at an end; and felt that even his future of ambition was empty and uncertain, dependent as it was on the passing caprice of one to whom he owned no tie of blood.

Long unaccustomed to control or contradiction, he grew moody and irritable; and the longer he brooded over his position, the more he deprecated

the restraint which it imposed upon his pursuits and tastes: until at length he convinced himself that he was not only aggrieved, but wronged, by the decision of the trusting woman, whose spirit had never suggested one doubt of his own worthiness.

Dark thoughts swept by degrees across his brain, taking shape and substance as they were indulged; until at length his foul and base resolve became matured, and the curse fell upon the castle of Hrisco which brought ruin in its train.

Having selected his ready tools, whose price was gold, and whose consciences were a waste whereon they left him free to write what crime he would, he made his way stealthily at midnight to the chamber of his adopted parent; and, forcing her from her bed, enveloped in a thick mantle which choaked her utterance, his emissaries bore the unhappy lady into a dark and secret dungeon under her own castle, remote from the wing inhabited by her attendants, and so long in disuse that it was not known even to the old seneschal who kept the keys of the vaults.

Thurzo had discovered this gloomy cell during one of those solitary wanderings over the fortress

in which he loved to indulge ; and at the moment when he passed under the low and heavy arch, and found himself standing in the dim and narrow space, apart from all his kind, and, to all seeming, cut off from human help save by a miracle, the fate of his wretched victim was sealed.

The following morning he assembled all the household of Hrisco, and by virtue of the deed of gift before mentioned, proclaimed himself lord of the castle, and its dependencies, in default of its mistress ; who, having become a maniac in consequence of so long brooding over her great and heavy afflictions, was no longer capable of governing either herself or her possessions ; and had been, by order of the physician (whom he had previously bribed to aid him in his dark work), removed to a place of security, where she could neither injure herself nor others.

Conscience rendered him quick of apprehension ; and the dark and doubtful glance which passed from one to another of the old and tried servants of the lady, did not escape the notice of Thurzo. There was threatening, too, in some of their looks ; and the resolution of the Count was taken at once.

"I, Francis Thurzo,"—he said coldly and haughtily; "Lord of Hrisco and Zeitawa, give notice to all within these walls, that they are forthwith to wait upon my treasurer, who will remit to each the amount of hire which may be due for his past services; and then speed on his own errand whithersoever he may list."

And with these brief words, from which all felt that there was no appeal, the old and tried retainers of the castle were peremptorily dismissed.

The fortress was soon garrisoned from gate to keep by the creatures of the Count; the vassals on the estate had done homage to their new suzerain; and then, not daring from a dread that his treachery would be discovered, to cross the drawbridge of Hrisco, Thurzo found himself a prisoner with his victim.

The unhappy lady, meanwhile, was sunk in wretchedness. Cut off even from the light of day—for it would have been mockery so to designate the dim reflection of the outer world which crept coldly along the wall of her cell for a few hours, and then faded, only to return on the morrow as blank and cheerless as before—buried deep in the living

rock, where not even a sound came to break the monotony of her existence ; she spent her time in tears, and doubt, and speculation ; while, with a true woman-trust in what she had once loved, she never dreamed that she had been sacrificed to her wealth, but deemed that some false calumny had gained the ear, and perverted the reason of Thurzo ; that he believed her faithless in her affection to himself ; and that in the paroxysm of his blind jealousy, he had committed this injustice.

Thus did she mentally argue for many days ; and feeling that he must ere long discover how greatly he had wronged her, she framed to herself the kind but firm expostulations with which she would meet his self-upbraiding repentance ; and pleased herself with the belief, that their reconciliation once over, he would be to her as a son from thenceforward, both in affection and in care.

But when long and weary months wore on, the unhappy lady could deceive herself thus no more ; and then it was, that after hours of bodily and mental suffering ; having long been sleepless, and driven by the excess of misery and despair to the verge of that madness of which she was already stated to be

the victim, she rose up from her bed of straw, and with the long and tangled masses of her hair streaming about her shoulders, her thin arms outstretched to heaven, and her pinched and haggard features upraised in all the deformity of frenzy, she invoked curses upon the wealth which she at last felt to have been her ruin ; upon the strong walls that shut her out from life and light ; and more bitter still, upon the human fiend who had sacrificed her to his avarice.

“ Hear me, Spirits of earth, air, and fire ! if such indeed there be ! ” she howled out in her misery ; “ send tempests, flames, and earthquakes here—even here ! Let the demons of perdition hold their revels in Hrisco ; things without shape and without name, loathsome alike to the eye and to the sense. I bequeathe this my home to these, and such as these. Let them respect the dead—the young pure dead—my own fair boys, who perished that their mother might work out her own ruin through the weak vanity of her woman-heart. Let them neither revel nor riot in that holy place, consecrated by the presence of the loved and lost : elsewhere all is free to them to come and to go unharmed, while one stone of

this foul pile yet rests upon another! And for him, the master-fiend, the cozening, glozing, apostate priest—the wretch who has built up his power upon my suffering and despair—may he be haunted by every horrible spectre that the grave in its midnight yawnings can vomit forth, to dry up the marrow in the bones of men. Let them cling to him, day and night, sleeping and waking, sitting and standing, alone and amid crowds; let them grapple with him in his bed, dip their foul claws into his dish, and their poisonous tongues into his cup, until he prays to die, and cannot!"

At length the wild voice, laden with this dark curse, ceased to be audible; and the wretched and maddened victim sunk back exhausted upon her miserable pallet, and never spoke again.

The fearful malediction had, however, one shuddering auditor. Her solitary jailor, the trusted emissary of the Count, stood with her scanty meal at the door of the dungeon, just as the desperate invocation was uttered; and, trembling in every limb, he hastened to repeat its purport to Thurzo, who listened aghast, and only motioned the messenger to quit his presence when the tale was told. The man

needed no second bidding; and ere long he had divulged the blighting secret to every creature in the castle; while murmured threats rose up on every side, and wild rumours passed from lip to lip, that the dark curse had already begun to work, and that every avenue and gallery of the castle was haunted by hideous and dusky forms, grinning malevolence and defiance on the passer-by.

The boldest man-at-arms at length became as timid as a child; loud and fierce howlings rose from the subterranean dungeons; the passages were infested with evil spirits, half human and half brute, who traversed the apartments, leaving traces of their passage on the charred and blackened floors; and at length the evil grew to such a height, that one by one, the terrified retainers fled the castle; while even the couch of the Count was no longer free from the presence of these unholy visitants, who clung to the pillars of his bed, mocking and gibbering, and twining their long arms among the hangings, or stretching their deformed and hideous limbs beside his own, burning the impressions of their hateful forms into his pillow and his coverlets; grappling with him as he lay, and flinging them-

selves heavily upon his chest and throat, until the blood rushed from his ears and nostrils ; while howlings, hootings, and shriekings, became his nocturnal music.

Sometimes, one among them would take the shape of the outraged lady, whom he had so foully wronged, and stand before him as she stood in her dungeon at the moment of her frightful curse ; and although he yelled in agony, and cried for help, it came not ; for none dared to enter his chamber, lest they should become hag-ridden like himself.

On one occasion, a monk was announced to him, whose fame for sanctity was rife throughout the province, and who came to exhort him to repentance and reparation ; and so rarely did any stranger now pass the drawbridge of Hrisco, and so weary had Thurzo become of the companionship of the obscene spirits by whom he was constantly surrounded, that he hailed the arrival even of this unpalatable visitor with pleasure ; and gave orders that he should be at once conducted to his presence.

It was the moment of the mid-day meal ; and when the friar crossed the threshold of the apartment, a host of foul and shapeless things were devouring

with avidity the repast which had been served up to the guilty Count. Their hooked and skinny claws were in every dish ; their horrid tongues in every flask ; but, as the cowled visitor came forward, they fled, howling and shrieking, from his presence.

And then the monk stood boldly before the conscience-stricken wretch, whose wealth and pomp had failed to purchase peace, and accused him with a loud voice in the presence of all his panic-struck retainers ; and called upon him to repair the wrong, and to confess the crime, and to humble himself even to the dust, that he might find mercy ; and so wrung his heart, and smote down the idols of his worldly vanity, that at length the proud spirit of the noble could brook no more ; and, with words of insult and threatening, he bade his attendants thrust the bold beggar from the gate.

There was the pause of a second, for no one stirred to obey the impious behest ; and then the sword of the Count sprang from its scabbard, as he swore to cut down the first who dared to disobey his bidding ; and his affrighted retainers, well knowing that he never spoke in vain, tremblingly laid hands

upon the monk, and put him forth. But he remained where they had left him : by day and night, through storm and sunshine, there stood that monk before the castle of Hrisco, shouting aloud the history of Thurzo's crime, and denouncing judgment on his head ; until at last, exasperated at this ominous voice, which joined its dark prophecies without the walls, to the demoniac diapason within, and which neither threats nor blows had been able to silence ; the infuriated Count gave orders that the monk should be seized, cast into the lowest dungeon beneath the keep, and left there to expire by famine.

The ruthless order was obeyed ; but on the following morning when the noble rose from his haunted and sleepless couch, and looked forth from his high casement, he beheld the nearest point of rock which touched upon the castle, changed into the outline of the monk, and leaning in a threatening attitude towards him. Blinded by rage, the frantic Thurzo ordered that it should be destroyed ; and a hundred hardy men-at-arms obeyed his bidding, and with heavy tools and stalwart blows, detached masses of the stones, and obliterated its human-looking outline. Their toil

was, however, vain ; for although they worked sturdily, the rock resumed its shape only more perfectly and more menacingly than before ; until not even the terror of their stern and vindictive master could compel the retainers of the Count to raise another axe, or to continue their opposition to the startling miracle.

Desertions from the fortress became more frequent than ever ; day by day the garrison grew more attenuated ; and at length, terrified lest he should be altogether abandoned to the horrors by which he was beset, Thurzo commanded the liberation of his prisoner, on condition that she should neither become his accuser nor her own avenger. But when the dungeon of the miserable victim was unbarred, and that she was borne forth into the light of day, it fell upon a corpse ; while her persecutor recognised in the distended and glaring eyes, the thin and parted lips, and the clenched and menacing hands, the same figure which had so long haunted him in the night watches.

With a long groan, Thurzo turned away, and hastened to hide himself at Zeitawa ; but he found no more peace on earth ; and meanwhile the evil

spirits held their saturnalia under the roof of the deserted castle of Hrisco, scaring thence every one who was bold enough to cross its threshold ; until, at length, long after any human foot had trod its desolate halls, the peasants of the valley were aroused at midnight by the fierce light of a conflagration ; and, starting from their beds, beheld the haunted fortress in flames. None knew how the fire had originated, nor was a hand outstretched to impede its progress ; and thus it raged until it found no longer food to prey upon ; and the strong pile was reduced to the state of ruin in which it may be seen to this day.

Several attempts were subsequently made to repair it, but on every occasion the portion built up during the day fell ere the following dawn ; and all hope of its restoration was at length reluctantly abandoned. Still, however, before the entrance, stands the Monk's Rock ; the menacing mass of stone which keeps its watch near what was once the casement of the treacherous Thurzo : and there will ever stand that ghostly and gigantic sentinel of judgment, until the crumbling of the universe shall involve its downfall in the common ruin.

CHAPTER III.

“ Now, by St. Stephen ! ” exclaimed the Count Nicholas Palfy ; “ I will e’en volunteer a tale myself, in order to wipe away the memory of that foul and apostate bishop ! No wonder that the vengeful fire became self-kindled to destroy the lair of so false-hearted a villain. It is a blot on our chivalry that such a page should be found in the volume of our national history.”

“ You, at least, can be at no loss, Count, to find a legend of far different import in the annals of your ancestry ; for the very name of Palfy has a trumpet-sound in the ear of an Hungarian ; and your annals must be a mere record of brave deeds, and noble exploits ” ; said the host ; “ From the Palfy who rode into the Rákos at the head of his armed vassals, and who was listened to with respect even at those stormy meetings of the Diet ; to those of your blood who checked the villain Turks in their ruthless invasions of our unhappy and victimised country : the

race from which you spring has been one of the best and bravest in the land."

"I thank you, Baron ;" said the young man proudly ; "nor is it less pleasant for a Palfy to remember that the matrons and maidens of his house have been as famous for their virtue and their loveliness, as any in all Hungary ; and foul befall the first of our name who flings it away upon a bride who may work its shame ! "

The vehemence of the Count brought a bright and burning blush to the cheek of the fair girl by whom he was seated ; and who was the loved and only daughter of the venerable lady whose legend had provoked the outburst ; and many a smile passed round the circle, as each felt that Palfy had already made his election ; and had no reason to fear that he should himself be the culprit whom he had just denounced. As he turned to address the gentle Adèle, and saw the warm suffusion spread over her brow and bosom, he suddenly became conscious of its cause ; and raising her small hand to his lips, he pressed it respectfully, and then said, as he glanced around him ; "Yes, my noble friends, it is even so ; you have guessed rightly ; nor do I

see why we should seek to conceal it. Some of you have marvelled that the impetuous Nicholas Palffy should so calmly have supported the inaction of his present existence ; and I am proud to acknowledge that I am indebted to this fair lady for teaching me not only patience, but a far dearer lesson. And now—” and he laughed gaily as he drew his chair yet nearer to that of the shrinking and confused bride-elect ; “ now that you have my secret, I shall avail myself of the immunities of my position ; and am ready to receive your congratulations !”

These were freely and heartily tendered, amid the whispered chidings of the young beauty, and the grave looks of her mother, who with much of the formality and all the hauteur of the past century, did not seek to disguise her disapprobation at the unceremonious frankness of her intended son-in-law ; but Palffy was too happy in the smiles of his lady-love to have any leisure to spare to the frowns of her less attractive parent : while the other guests were complimenting themselves on the penetration which had enabled them for some days past to discover that the effects of the snow-storm would not all end in a thaw ; and as no prophecies are so

correct as those which succeed the event, so these all appeared to have every prospect of verification ; and so fertile a subject did the intended alliance prove to the whole party, that it was the future Countess herself, who, in order to change the theme of discourse, reminded Palfy that he had volunteered a legend.

The happy young man would, however, fain have recalled his promise, declaring that the vile Bishop of Neutra haunted his spirit no longer : but the plea was not allowed ; and he consequently consented good-humouredly to redeem his pledge ; and after the pause of a moment, he accordingly did so by relating the tradition of—

THE TALISMAN.

In the year 1594, when the Turks held sway in Buda, and that the Sultan Solyman, having possessed himself of the person of the infant sovereign, John Sigismund Zápolya, reduced the whole of Hungary, comprised within the rivers Ráab and Theiss, into a Turkish province, the important fortress of Ráab, on the frontier, also fell into the power of the Infidels. The moment of defeat was

a bitter one to the brave men who had resisted until resistance became impossible: for they remembered the fate of their metropolitan city, whose palaces had been burned; her desecrated churches converted into Turkish mosques, or degraded to still viler uses; her garrison put to the sword; and her streets destroyed by fire; while plague, contagion, and demoralization became rife among her population.

As time wore on, the Moslem had become more cruel, and more insolent; for the armies of the Crescent were intoxicated with success; and the defeat of the emperor, before Buda, in 1542, had completed their triumph.

Since that event, they had been gradually, but surely spreading themselves over the face of the country; and when the stronghold of Ráab was at length threatened, every effort was made by the gallant Christian garrison to secure this frontier-key against their Moslem invaders.

Erlan, Grán, and Ráab, were three very important possessions for the Turks, particularly the latter, which laid bare the city of Presburg to the conquerors, and even exposed the safety of Vienna itself; nor is it too much to assert, that had the

Moslem monarchs who succeeded Solyman, resembled those who reigned before him, not only Vienna, but all southern Germany, must have fallen into the power of the Infidels.

But a change came over the race of the prophet. The brave conqueror of Hungary had been the thirteenth successive hero who had girt on the sacred sword of empire; and he was succeeded by twenty monarchs, who supinely cast aside the lance and the shield, to show to all Christianity how poor, contemptible, and vicious a thing a Moslem ruler *might* be; and to teach those who had seen the cross vailed for a time beneath the sway of the crescent, that its supremacy was not fated to endure. Each after each, they had successively passed a useless existence of demoralizing self-indulgence and idle luxury; and either died unlamented in the midst of their foul career, or were strangled through the agency of their impatient, and equally impotent successors.

The triumph of Sinan Pasha, who led the troops, was great and arrogant, when Ráab fell into his power; for in losing this important stronghold, the Christians found their intentions thwarted,

and their best plans for the future rendered abortive. They remembered that Solyman had already conquered in Syria, Persia, and Egypt; and they began to indulge in bitter forebodings of the fate of their own empire. To enhance the evil, it was only too well known that the Emperor Rudolph was jealous of his brother Matthias, of whose intentions he was suspicious; and was better pleased, Christian though he was, that the Infidels had possessed themselves of this key to Gratz and Vienna, even although they should be able to retain their conquest, and to fortify the place, than if it had been reconquered by his gallant kinsman.

The command of the fortress was given to Ali Pasha of Sorrento, an Italian renegade, at once the countryman and the contemporary of Torquato Tasso; who was one of the most daring and successful of the Turkish leaders. He had been taken prisoner at the conquest of Chio, where he fell covered with wounds, after fighting with a desperate bravery which won the admiration even of his Moslem enemies; who, anxious to gain him over to their cause, treated him with a marked distinction and honour, which contrasted broadly with the in-

gratitude that he had met at the hands of his Christian allies ; and rendered him a willing proselyte.

With the turban, Ali Pasha at once put on the most deadly enmity to all descriptions of Franks. The sight of a Christian, and the remembrance of the creed that he had foresworn, rendered him stern and implacable ; while his thorough acquaintance with the science of war, made him a dangerous adversary, as well as a cruel one.

The Archduke Maximilian appeared before Ráab with a numerous and efficient army, but he only added to the triumph of the renegade general; for after a battle in which neither party obtained any advantage, he retreated in confusion, leaving the Infidels still masters of the stronghold. Maximilian, indeed, was fated to misfortune ; for in the action fought against the forces of Zamoisky, which introduced the Swedish Sigismund, he was himself overpowered, and made prisoner ; and, although he sat down before Ráab with a picked and well-provisioned body of troops, apparently too numerous to fear defeat, he was, nevertheless, obliged to raise the siege, with an enormous loss both of men and munition.

The insolent triumph of the Italian renegade knew no bounds. From expressing on every occasion his contempt of the enemy, he at length grew to feel it. His vigilance relaxed ; or, rather, his absence of caution was ostentatiously displayed. Long-continued success led him into a belief that he was invincible ; and, at length, he arrogantly refused to close the city gates during the night, to raise the drawbridges, or even to plant a sufficient number of sentinels upon the walls ; and, not satisfied with this display of his self-value, and ill-placed vanity, he determined to immortalize his occupation of Ráab by a public monument.

He, consequently, erected over one of the gates of the town a superb kiosque, which he surmounted by an immense cock, wrought in iron ; and proclaimed by beat of drum that “ Until that bird should crow, the Christians should never again be lords of Ráab :” while he caused the same presumptuous assertion to be inscribed upon the principal guns of the citadel.

But although Rudolph the Second was a supine monarch, and that his imbecility seemed from day to day to be progressing towards absolute lunacy, still

there were those about him who remembered that the conquered fortress of Ráab was situated too near the gates of Vienna, to render its undisturbed occupancy by the Turks, matter of either policy or safety, and its recapture an unimportant object; even had the courageous and indignant voice of the Hungarian people failed to remind the emperor of his duty.

For four years, Ráab had been in the possession of the Infidels. Open force, and desperate bravery had alike been vain to reclaim it; and, after many and anxious consultations, it was determined to attempt its recovery by surprise.

The petard was then a famous, but by no means common, implement of warfare; and to this it was resolved that recourse should be had, whenever a favourable opportunity could be secured for its application. The two generals of Matthias who enjoyed the greatest share of his confidence, were Adolphus Schwarzenberg, and Nicholas Palfy, both men of illustrious family and tried valour; and to them was confided the important task of reconquering Ráab, and thereby delivering an important portion of Christendom from the terror of the Infidel. They accordingly proceeded to the

neighbouring fortress of Comorn ; where they collected a troop of Hungarian lancers, whom they added to their infantry, which was composed of a mixed force of Germans, Walloons, Spaniards, and French ; and having ascertained, by means of their spies, that Ali Pasha had, with his usual careless arrogance, dispatched a strong party of his best janissaries to Buda for money and provisions, they felt that the favourable moment for attack had arrived.

On the evening of the 27th of March, the Christian soldiers left Comorn, and remained, during the whole of the following day concealed in the woods ; nor was it until the night of the 29th, that they ventured with extreme caution to approach the walls of the apostate fortress. Some of the lancers selected for the service were conversant with the Turkish dialect ; and these were sent forward to hail the nearest sentinel, and to describe themselves as a portion of the force dispatched to Buda, which was safely arrived within an arrow's flight of the city, after having been terribly harassed by the Christians, who were still hanging upon their rear ; which rendered it necessary that they should enter the city stealthily and without noise,

in order to avoid another encounter at the gates; where, in the darkness, they might lose a portion of their treasure.

No objection was offered by the guard, who was stabbed by the first man who reached him; and the party crossed the drawbridge, and applying the petard to the gate beyond it, the massy timbers were rent asunder with a concussion which forced them three hundred paces apart; while, amidst the confusion, the little band of heroes rushed on into the streets of the city. All their movements had been previously decided, and consequently each leader at once led his gallant band to its appointed post. Schwarzenberg and Sebastian Tókoly, an Hungarian magnate of high blood, and tried courage, remained near the shattered gate; while the Count Palfy drew up his lancers upon the drawbridge.

The bursting of the gates aroused the slumbering Turks; and bewildered, confused, and desperate, they attacked the invading Christians on every side. In numbers they were superior to their enemies, but they were more familiar with the sinuosities of the city, and thus they were for a time enabled, even amid their consternation, to make head successfully

against this unlooked-for incursion ; and the Christians were three times repulsed and driven back towards the gate, but the reserve of Palfy and Schwarzenberg turned the tide of fortune on each occasion. The invaders fought with the courage of desperation ; for superadded to their hatred of the Infidels, was the foreknowledge of the fate which awaited them, should they be overpowered and taken : while the Turks, enraged at the reckless boldness with which they had ventured to brave them to their beards, fought rather like wild beasts than like men battling with their kind.

The midnight streets ran blood. The Christians growing weaker and weaker, began to give way, slowly, indeed, and reluctantly, but surely, before their impetuous foe. The war-cry of the Moslem scared the calm ear of heaven ; and the cavalry, summoned by Schwarzenberg, refused to leave their horses, and share the growing peril in the streets of the city.

Another moment's indecision would have sealed the triumph of the Moslem ; but even as the craven words were uttered, Palfy himself sprang from his horse, and shouting “ Let me rather die than be

dishonoured!" rushed through the ruin-cumbered gateway. His example was electrical. In the next instant every saddle was empty; and with a cry of "God and St. Stephen!" the whole troop dashed on after their leader. They had scarcely passed the arch, when the loud shrill crowing of a cock, thrice repeated, rang out upon the night air, and was heard distinctly through every quarter of the city. The Turkish garrison, panic-stricken at the sound, gave way like frightened sheep: they remembered the proud vaunt of their Pasha, and felt that the talisman had failed them; but Ali Pasha himself, more desperate, and probably less superstitious, still fought like a demoniac, and finally fell, pierced with wounds, under the sword of Palfy.

When the day dawned, Omar Aga, who had possession of the citadel, surrendered unconditionally: and although many of his men flung themselves from the ramparts to avoid falling into the power of the Christians, nevertheless, the number of prisoners amounted to three hundred; and, what was still more valuable, an immense quantity of provision and ammunition, and one hundred and eighty cannon, became the property of the emperor; while the

booty obtained by the soldiery during the sack of the city, was very considerable.

And thus the conquest of this great palladium of Christianity—the delivery of Ráab from the Turkish yoke—and the punishment of an arrogant apostate, were proclaimed, and partially produced, by the cry of a bird—that bird whose dumb effigy had been designed by presumptuous human pride to typify the everlasting duration of Turkish supremacy and power.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was not one in the whole party whose heart did not beat quicker as the tradition of the young Count progressed; and his auditory were so much engrossed by the tale, that when it terminated, each insisted that he had omitted many of the details, and proved himself a defective chronicler; all, save the fair girl who sat beside him, and who was busily asking herself how she should ever bear to see her lover arming for battle, where the same frightful dangers might await him to which his brave ancestor had so nearly fallen a sacrifice.

The saddest and the most silent of the party, was the sorrow-stricken Lady of Revay, a widowed cousin of the host, whose dim eyes were seldom raised from her embroidery frame, and whose pale and furrowed cheek looked as though it had long been more familiar with tears than smiles. Her tall and majestic figure, her close mourning dress, and the silvery-white hair which was closely bound across

her high calm brow, and shrouded beneath a coif of black velvet embroidered with jet, gave her a peculiar and sybil-like look, which her grave and self-centred manner greatly heightened ; and it was only they who mourned, who knew how warm a heart beat beneath that cold exterior.

Hers was a sad story, poor lady ! In early youth she had betrothed herself to the Baron Revay, with whose ancestors her own had been at feud for more than a century ; and whom she had met at the house of a mutual friend, where they had learned to love each other as only young hearts *can* love, and mutually plighted their faith, ere her parents were apprised of the attachment.

When it was made known to them, their anger and indignation knew no bounds ; and they haughtily refused to listen, either to the pleadings of the suitor, or the entreaties of their child ; while the family of the Baron, in their turn, spared neither prayers nor taunts to induce their young kinsman to relinquish the alliance.

The lovers were, however, proof against all opposition ; and, although not permitted either to see each other, or to hold any communication, closely watched,

and constantly solicited to abandon so unpropitious and unpalatable a marriage, they remained firm ; hoped on against hope ; and ultimately, on the death of the lady's father, were united, to the great annoyance and disappointment of the relatives on both sides.

Their marriage took place immediately before the departure of the Archduke Charles to meet the invading army of the Corsican Emperor ; and Revay was reluctantly compelled to leave his beautiful young bride, in order to assume his post, which was one of trust and distinction near the person of the prince.

For a time, intelligence of her absent husband reached the mourning lady by every courier who passed into Hungary ; but even this did not satisfy her anxious heart, and she removed with her reluctant mother to Vienna, in order to secure still earlier and more frequent tidings. Alas ! she did but hasten her own misery ; for she had not been an inhabitant of the Austrian capital more than a couple of weeks, where her extreme loveliness, her youth, and her utter devotedness to her absent lord, had secured to her the sympathy and interest of the whole court and city, when the last messenger for whom she ever again looked in hope,

conveyed to the authorities the news of a defeat, of a worsted prince, and a flying army ; while to her he brought tidings even more black than these : for what were in that hour blighted ambition or national defeat to the widow of Revay ? And he was laden also with this fatal news !

There were high and noble names upon the death-scroll that he unfolded on his arrival, but the lady of Revay read only one there ; for every word on which she looked took the same form, and she saw upon the gloomy page only the record of her own wretched fate.

She withdrew from Vienna ; her mission there was ended ; and she buried herself for a time in a retired fortress which had belonged to her dead husband, and in which she had passed with him a few of those brief and happy weeks which succeeded their ill-omened union, in order that he might pursue in its vicinity the pleasures of the chase ; but after a time she yielded to the entreaties of her kinsman, that she would share with him a home which protracted bachelorhood had rendered as solitary as her own ; and, on the departure of her mother, who left her to contract a second marriage, she aban-

doned her beloved retreat, to contribute to his happiness ; and had subsequently made her own in hearty affection, and in her love for his orphan nephew, the young miner, who looked upon her with the devotion of a son.

For his sake, she had submitted to the incursion, and the excitement, of the joyous party now collected in the castle ; and equally for his sake, when circumstances extended their stay from days to weeks, she bore up against the suffering which it occasioned her, without one word or gesture of impatience ; but it was only when the circle was formed around the hearth in peace, and that the stirring tales of other times superseded the ringing laughter and the rattling dice, that she at length felt herself to be one of the numerous group collected there, and capable of participating in the general interest.

It were needless to say, after this brief sketch of her history, that the premature old age which had blanched her hair, and planted furrows in her cheeks, had effectually secured her against the advances of any second suitor ; and that even had any individual, attracted by her broad lands and proud

castles, been content to overlook these personal disadvantages, there was a chilling rigidity and a silent gravity in her bearing, which would have silenced his pretensions at the first interview.

The young miner, pleased to remark that his revered kinswoman had evidently been awakened into interest by the narratives which had been related; although he had discovered that such was indeed the case, from such minute indications as would have escaped the attention of a less affectionate nature, had nothing nearer at heart than to excite a livelier feeling of sympathy towards herself, by inducing her, in her turn, to tell them some legend of her race, such as she was in the habit of narrating to himself, when they sat alone together in the twilight.

He ventured the request; and at first the lady started and shrank back, as though she could not brook to find herself the centre of attention; and a faint colour rose to her wasted cheek, as delicate as that which the waves leave on the lip of the magic shell, from which they retire with a blush, at having for a moment deadened its low sweet music. It was a bloom which called back to the hearts of the elder persons who then looked on her, a vivid

memory of the beauty that she once possessed ; while the younger ones gazed on each other in surprise, as though to ask if this could indeed be the cold, stern, impassive cousin of their host.

The emotion endured, however, only for a brief instant ; and then with a sad smile, the lady of Revay said softly : “ I know not, Istvan, how to deny you any thing, although I could have wished that you had spared me this effort. It is my duty to these our noble guests, not to shrink from any attempt which may conduce to their gratification ; nor shall I do so. Alas ! it will be a tale of grief, for I know none other ; but I must pray them to pardon this. I need not go beyond the records of our own house to find both crime and sorrow ; and of such, unhappily, are made the most enduring memorials of human nature : nor shall I even delay my auditors to ransack my memory, for it is overladen with these lingering shadows of the past ; and perhaps it is better so ; as they serve to sober down the false and bitter glare of the present.”

THE TRAITOR-MONK.

The mountainous range which hems in, like an eternal belt, the northern part of Hungary, cutting

against the sky in quaint and picturesque outline, and affording shelter alike to the wild beast of the wood and the cavern, and the equally wild, and almost equally ruthless robber of the forest; is studded with fortified castles, and the strange mystic-looking remnants of mighty strongholds, which baffle the eye by the ingenuity with which the living rock has been subjugated to the will of man, and made subservient to his convenience and necessities; making it difficult, now that the same time-tint has fallen upon the ponderous masonry, and the surface of the mountain itself, to distinguish where art had usurped the place of nature, and human beings based a superstructure of their own formation, on the foundation built up by the hands of the Deity.

The wanderer who ventures to explore some of these mysterious, and cloud-canopied ruins, will find himself suddenly passing from a wide hall, upon whose walls still cling the mouldering remains of rude and heavy sculpture—gaunt and almost shapeless colosse, bearing some feeble semblance to humanity, and proving by their disproportionate hideousness, and savage design, the remote period of their creation—into a cavern hewn in the heart of

the rock, into which it is now impossible to decide whether the light of day was ever permitted to penetrate; and, if so, from whence it was admitted.

It is a strange and a painful reflection, that in every instance, the most perfect portion of a ruined stronghold is that which contains the dungeons. The banqueting-hall, and the bower-chamber—the proud rampart, and the lofty keep—all the tall and haughty symbols of man's power, and of man's pride, moulder, totter, and fall; but the relics of his misery remain as an enduring memorial of the past. And it must be so: for man in his strength and in his joy looks up to heaven, and bathes his brow in the pure ether; while man in his ruin, and in his despair, is incarcerated where neither breeze nor sunshine can reach him in his wretchedness: and thus, the stately hall becomes a roofless space, and the cavern-cell remains.

The large plains, or *pusztas*, which stretch along the banks of the Danube and the Theiss, were formerly inundated by wandering hordes of Marhanis, Magyars, Mongols, and Poles, who successively dislodged each other; and frequently with so little resistance, that no mention is made in the history

of the times as to the exact period of their location : but when the Turks were ultimately swept from the country, they left behind them fearful and lasting traces of a tyranny which had existed for upwards of a century and a half.

All the previous invaders had satisfied themselves with a wild sort of settlement, which may fairly be styled a bivouac : they made their rude dwellings like men who felt that they were there only on sufferance ; and that, should their strength prove inadequate to retain what they had taken, they must, in their turn, yield up their tenure. Their domestic architecture vied with that of the American Indian ; wood and mud supplied them with material ; they required neither magazines nor bridges ; and they poured over the *pusztas* in vast bands, easily removed, and easily replaced ; only half armed ; and wholly deficient in that most powerful inducement to valour—a love of father-land. They were strangers to the soil ; and as they successively passed away, so were they forgotten.

To escape all contact and danger from these wild hordes, each of the more legitimate, or the more powerful inhabitants of the region, took pos-

session of the summit of a precipitous rock, or the crest of a difficult mountain, and there erected his place of refuge ; and this fact accounts for the constantly recurring apparition of mouldering castles, and dilapidated strongholds, which meet the eye of the traveller throughout all this section of Hungary.

Among others, the chieftain of Thurotz, a small province shut in by lofty and frowning heights, built the castellated fortress of Blattnitz ; a pile, venerable even in decay, which was the cradle of many a brave and gallant Baron of the house of Revay ; a race than which none more noble holds place in the annals of the land ; and who in time acquired, as the guerdon of their valiant achievements in many a well-fought field, not only extensive possessions, but also the proud title of Counts of Thurotz, and the rank of hereditary lord-lieutenants of the county.

In the valley beneath the castle stood a monastery, the pious fame of whose holy brotherhood had extended throughout the country. The monks of Blattnitz were the oracles and marvel of the province ; revered for their sanctity, they were the depository of every domestic secret ; and honoured

for their wisdom, they were the counsellors in every difficulty, and the judges in every cause. Riches poured in upon them ; not red gold and gleaming jewels, but the riches of the soil ; they had a tithe of all the produce for leagues round. Their wine-press was full to overflowing at that genial season, when labour is lightened by song, and the merry vintagers turn toil into festival ; and their storehouses were piled with grain, when the yellow harvest had been gathered in. The fig and the olive, the pistachio and the pomegranate, all that could be garnered up to lend luxury to the winter repast, was alike offered in profusion to the monks of Blattnitz ; while from the lords of the two rival fortresses of Blattnitz and Znio, they received that protection which alone could secure them from the predatory incursions of the savage occupants of the *pusztas*.

Of all the pious community, Father Odilo was the most celebrated, both for his learning and for the rigid severity of his life. Skilled not only in decyphering the few printed volumes which had found their way to that remote spot, but able also with his pen ; it is not surprising that the ascetic should have

been regarded with extreme veneration by the neighbourhood ; and, that when to these accomplishments was added a knowledge of the virtues of roots, herbs, and minerals, which enabled him to act as a leech in cases of sickness and suffering, he should have been almost idolized.

Father Odilo, however, bore his honours meekly ; and divided his time between his study, his confessional, and his patients, with a quiet zeal that disarmed malignity and envy, even should any less venerated brother have become jealous of his popular supremacy. So humbly-minded was he, moreover, that when the Lady of Blattnitz would have wooed him to the castle with the Abbot her confessor, he had ever found a reason for declining the proffered honour, and retreating to his solitude, and to his duties.

It chanced, however, that on a day when the lordly Abbot was prostrated by sickness, and unable to receive her visit, the Châtelaine arrived in haste at the monastery ; and, springing from the mule which had borne her down the mountain, on learning the indisposition of the Superior, desired that Father Odilo might attend her on the instant.

Lowly was the salutation with which the monk entered the spacious apartment where the Lady of Blattnitz was pacing to and fro the stone floor, with hasty and agitated steps. She paused as he appeared upon the threshold, and beckoned him to approach. He obeyed in silence; and as the heavy door closed behind him, he stood within a pace of the Baron's wife.

"I have sent for you, father;" she commenced as she gained his side; "because I have faith in your wisdom, and that the fortunes of our house hinge upon your firmness. I have no time for compliment or ceremony; you have a duty to perform—you owe it to the Lords of Blattnitz—and a few words will suffice to show you its nature. You may have heard that the Baron has a daughter——"

She paused for an instant, and Odilo bowed a silent assent.

"The Lady Elika is our only child;" she pursued, ere he had again raised his head: "she has been bewitched by some foul spell—she must have been—the hopes of our noble house are centred in her—from her childhood she has ever been gentle, loving, and obedient; and her father, satisfied that

she would never have another will than his, betrothed her to a brave chieftain, whose proud descent rendered him worthy of an alliance with the Barons of Revay. But, alas! holy father, though the bridegroom, summoned to Blattnitz by its lord, is already on his way, and that we know not the hour in which we may hear the blast of his bugle at the castle gate, my hitherto gentle child will not suffer his name to be breathed before her; and sets at nought the menaces of her irritated parent. No cause can be assigned for this most strange rebellion; but, be it born of what it may, it must be crushed, or blood will follow. Even now, I tremble as the moments pass me by; for when did ever human being gainsay the will of the proud chief of Blattnitz, and live to boast the prowess?"

"Lady," said the monk, submissively but firmly; "indulge not in such wild fears; they are too horrible. Speed back to your proud home; and without loss of time direct your daughter to the abbey chapel. I will await her there; and it may be that as she pours out her transgressions in the confessional, I shall learn that which may enable me to reconcile the maiden to her fate."

"Thanks, father; 'tis a wise thought;" said the Lady of Blattnitz, as she again hurriedly enveloped herself in her heavy mantle, and hastened to the court-yard, obsequiously attended by the monk: " 'Tis a wise thought; and the brave chief of yonder haughty pile shall live to thank you for it also."

So saying, and bowing her proud head courteously to the recluse, who had dutifully held her stirrup as she mounted, the Baron's wife rode forth of the monastery, followed by her attendants.

The day was far advanced ere the Lady Elika reached the convent, which was, moreover, darkened by the huge shadow of the mountain even beyond the gloom of the hour; and all the shrines were buried in obscurity, save one in a lateral chapel near the confessional, which threw a broad light upon the face of the penitent.

As the maiden passed the threshold of the edifice, the monk was slowly pacing to and fro the side-aisle by which she must advance. It was the first occasion on which he had ever seen her; and even amid the twilight he was struck by the light grace of her figure, and the buoyancy of her step. But he did not linger to offer any salutation; and

meekly bowing his head upon his breast, he at once led the way to the confessional.

The pause which enabled the Baron's daughter to collect her thoughts, and to offer up her silent prayer ere the ceremony of confession commenced, as she knelt before the grating which separated her from the monk, was far differently employed by Father Odilo. A veil seemed to have been withdrawn from before his eyes. Hitherto he had only dreamed of beauty, but now he saw it before him—real, sentient, palpable. Hitherto he had looked upon no woman-face fairer than that of some mountain maiden, whose brow had been swept by the keen blasts of her native heights, until its bloom was deepened into ruddiness; or some Bohemian wanderer, whose sparkling eyes and teeth were inadequate to counteract the effect of the cunning and audacity of her expression; but now, as the broad light of the shrine streamed full upon the high pale brow, and finely-cut features of the Lady Elika, and turned her auburn curls to threads of gold, the monk felt his heart beat high, and his pulses throb with a new and strange emotion.

It was not without effort that Father Odilo with-

drew his attention from the person of his penitent to fix it upon her confession ; and for awhile he was lost in wonder at the beautiful purity of a nature which had never dreamt of sin, but imputed to itself as crime even the most venial errors ; and he was rapidly forgetting to hearken to the outpourings of the innocent young mind, and suffering himself once more to become absorbed in the surpassing loveliness of the fair girl who knelt before him ; when at length painful and labouring sobs, which almost rendered her words inarticulate, again drew the attention of the monk to the duty which he was there to perform ; and ere the rite was ended, he had discovered the secret cause of the maiden's repugnance to her intended bridegroom.

Midway between the castles of Znio and Blattnitz, in a deep gorge, formed by the receding of the rival mountains, stood a small chapel, dedicated to the Virgin, as “ Our Lady of Hope.” It was a small edifice, half masonry and half rock ; the inner portion of the shrine being formed by a natural cavern, where the uncouth outline of the irregular surface having been believed, in some moment of pious enthusiasm, by a former Abbot of Blattnitz, to resemble

the form of a female, he took advantage of the conceit to induce one of the superstitious ancestors of the present Baron to erect the chapel, and to endow it for ever; the community of Blattnitz undertaking from the grant to adorn the altar, and to light up the shrine on days of high festival.

In this chapel, whose heavy door ever stood open to receive the prayers and the alms of all the pilgrims who might chance to brave the mountain-path, the Lady Elika had vowed a deep and holy vow, of which the object was the handsome, chivalrous, and high-born Illamer, the favourite page of the Lord of Znio.

When and how they had first met both had forgotten: it was enough for them to feel and know that they had become everything to each other; and that neither time, nor absence, nor opposition, could ever make them faithless.

They had plighted their vows in the chapel of the pass: Elika had laid upon the altar a golden ring and a chaplet of the wild hawthorn; while Illamer had cast a handful of coin into the metal plate, which held its honoured station at the feet of the Virgin; and when they rose from their knees they

forgot, in their young happiness, that there were other wills and other hopes on earth besides their own.

All this wild tale of innocent and reckless love did the monk eagerly devour: the maiden's fate was in his hands. Full well he knew that the Baron of Blattnitz was not one who would give his daughter to a pennyless page, who had even a name to win; but he soothed the weeping maiden with kind words and gentle tones, and promised that he would see her mother on the morrow; and, without betraying her secret, plead for delay in her nuptials.

As the weeping Elika rose from her knees, Odilo quitted the confessional, and his acknowledged sympathy and earnest manner brought comfort to her heart. Together they traversed the chapel aisle, with slow and noiseless steps; and when, at length, the maiden left the monastery, it was with a tranquillized spirit and renovated hope.

No longer did the monk shun the castle of Blattnitz. The Abbot had resumed his duties near the wife of the Baron; but by mutual consent the conscience of his daughter was committed to the care of Odilo; nor was it long, ere, yielding to the

unholy passion which he had suffered to overcome alike his reason and his principles, the wretched monk dared to profane the pure and innocent ears of Elika by the confession of his love. Unmitigated disgust and unconcealed contempt were the reply : the indignation of the maiden gave her strength ; and she vowed, should he dare to repeat the outrage, that she would expose him to her father, and thus deliver him over to a fate as certain as it would be severe.

The answer to her bold threat was a laugh of proud defiance : Odilo had her secret ; and one word from his mouth would call down upon her the curse of her haughty father, and ensure the sacrifice of her lover's life. He told her this with a smile of bitterness and triumph ; and the gentle girl was crushed and silenced by the fatal truth. She could but weep and pray ; while the monk was touched only by her loveliness as she knelt before him in her tears, and answered her supplications with mockings, or with vows. When she threatened, he shut her mouth with threatenings still more violent ; nor guessed he then how soon and how fearfully his own would be closed for ever !

Rendered desperate by his passion, Odilo endeavoured to entrap the gallant Illamer into a snare which he had craftily laid, and which would have terminated at once his life and his hopes ; but fortune favoured the unhappy lovers ; and when the monk expected to see the page pass the mountain-defile, alone and unattended on a mission from his lord, he beheld from his ambush the chief himself, surrounded by his followers, galloping gaily towards the castle of Blattnitz.

Foiled, but only more resolved, Odilo made a last appeal to the affrighted girl herself : he cast himself at her feet ; he clasped her knees ; he even wept in his turn ; but his sinful tears were odious to the Lady Elika, and she bade him begone, with a fierce sparkle in her eye, which brought a vow of vengeance to his lip that he too soon fulfilled.

From the presence of the outraged girl he passed to that of her father ; and there, with downcast looks and heavy sighs, and words that seemed to torture him in the utterance, he betrayed his holy trust ; and ere he left the Baron, the fatal secret of Elika's love was in the keeping of her infuriated parent.

Illamer was for the moment beyond his reach, for he had been dispatched by his lord into a distant province on a mission of trust and danger ; and this the monk well knew, when he selected the moment of his treachery ; but summoning his wife and daughter to his presence, the Baron of Blattnitz overwhelmed them both with curses and reproaches, and immediately hurried off a trusted messenger to hasten the arrival of the chieftain, to whom he had pledged the hand of the Lady Elika.

Already had the monk ascertained from some of his creatures in the fortress of Znio, that the return of Illamer was expected within a few days ; and too well he knew that the little solitary chapel of "Our Lady of Hope," was the trysting-place of the lovers, where the page had always lighted a taper upon the altar as a signal to his betrothed that he awaited her presence ; for all this had the too-confiding Elika betrayed in the confessional, where she had blindly hoped to interest the monk in the issue of her love : nor was this a circumstance likely to be forgotten by the unworthy Odilo.

Anxiously, therefore, did the man of evil keep watch from twilight to twilight for the signal light ;

nor did he long watch in vain ; for Illamer, who, during his brief absence which to him had seemed like an eternity, had thought only of his love, had no sooner seen the daylight wane after his return to the stronghold of Znio, than with all the impatience of affection, he hastened to the mountain-shrine, and ignited the accustomed taper.

Elika was already at her high casement, whence she could look down upon the chapel ; and no sooner distinguished the faint beacon which summoned her to her lover's presence, than quickly and stealthily traversing the court-yard of the castle, she applied a key, of which she had possessed herself, to a low door that opened from the walls ; and hastened to the place of tryst.

It was a dreary evening ; the keen wind blew aside her mantle, and scattered her auburn tresses ; while the forest boughs swayed and groaned as with a warning voice, and the wild birds shrieked as they winged their way to their eyries in the rock. The drift was scudding hurriedly across the sky, and at times wholly obscured the moon ; and the maiden shuddered with a nameless dread as she increased the distance between herself and her

home. But this feeling passed away at once as she moved across the threshold of the chapel, and threw herself into the extended arms of Illamer. They had so much to say ; so much to ask ; all Illamer's hopes—all Elika's fears—the dawn might have grown upon them and found the subject still unexhausted ; but this was not to be. They had offered up their silent and earnest prayer, and stood together, the arm of the youth supporting the slight figure of the maiden, and her fair cheek pillow'd upon his shoulder, when strange men burst upon their solitude ; and ere the page could draw his sword, a dagger was in his heart ; and the wretched Elika was dragg'd from his arms, and hurried, muffled in a thick mantle, from the chapel.

The precaution of her captors was, however, vain ; for the maiden made no effort to avert her fate. As she was torn from the clasp of her lover, she lost all consciousness ; nor was it until many hours had elapsed that she awoke as from the sleep of death, and feebly called upon the name of her favourite attendant. But no accustomed voice answered to her call ; no ready care administered to her wishes ; and, after the suspense of a few moments, which seemed

to be passed in an unpleasant dream, so imperfect was her memory of the past, and her conception of the present, she raised herself timidly on her arm, and looked around her.

For a time she could not persuade herself that she was yet awake, for she was surrounded by poverty and squalour, in the hut of a charcoal burner; one of that rude and half-savage race whose home is in the forest, and whose actions are wholly governed by the will of their feudal lords.

It was under the mean roof of one of the serfs of the monastery of Blattnitz, that the unfortunate Elika awoke to consciousness; and she might, with equal hope, have looked for sympathy or pity from the savage animals of the forest, as from the superstitious vassal, whose only dream of salvation was pillow'd on the intercession of his monkish masters.

In reply to her entreaties, her reproaches, and her tears, the serf only bade her be patient, for that on the morrow she would know all; and having placed beside her some food which had been carefully provided by her captors, he strode coldly from the hut, making fast the door behind him, and

abandoning the miserable prisoner to all the horrors of recovered memory and fearful anticipation.

Odilo, meanwhile, sped to the castle of Blattnitz; and there, with many a well-feigned sigh of grief, communicated to the astounded Baron the intelligence that his only child had fled with Lord Znio's page. Fearful were the effects of his tale. Baffled pride, wounded affection, and power defied, together grappled at the heart of the haughty chief. He summoned a score of his most trusty vassals, and scattered them over the face of the country, in pursuit of the fugitives; but they all alike returned without tidings, for the monk had spread his nets too warily for their traces to be discovered; and it was ultimately believed that the missing pair had taken refuge with some of the wild hordes of the *pusztas*.

When the dawn rose, the wretched maiden, whose life had hitherto been one of gentle tending, and that rude luxury which marked the period, rose from her squalid couch, and looked around her. Hasty preparations had been made for her reception, but they were meagre and insufficient; and she felt at once that she was subjected to a degra-

dation which in that age was almost without parallel.

The room, if such it could indeed be called, in which she had passed the night, was formed by unhewn blocks of timber, cemented together with mud; and piles of charcoal, collected for transport, still occupied a portion of the narrow space, extending from floor to roof. The lady looked on all this desolation with terror at her heart; for she instinctively felt that none save those who had the worst designs against her, would so outrage her sex and rank: nor were her miserable thoughts long perplexed with doubt, ere they rested on the author of the wrong; while, as the image of the monk, strong in the success of his base scheme, rose vividly before her, she almost shrieked aloud in her agony of spirit.

In the first paroxysm of her despair, as the hateful truth flashed upon her, she sprang to the narrow door of the hut—Could she but escape! What were the terrors of the forest-depths with their savage occupants, to this dark hovel and its still more savage owner? True, she knew not where they had spirited her; but she felt that had she once

again a free foot upon the mountain, and the breath of heaven upon her brow, she could dare the worst ! But alas ! the stout block of oak which formed the door resisted her mightiest efforts ; and, after vainly putting forth her slender strength, she sank back on her rude pallet, breathless and exhausted.

And then her thoughts reverted to Illamer. Why came he not to her rescue ? Had love no spell by which to trace out her prison ? Even as she asked herself the question, memory grew keener ; and a vision of her struggling lover, with the dagger in his heart, grew into distinctness and vitality before her ; and with a wild sob which seemed to rend her bosom, she buried her face in her spread hands, and resigned herself to her mysterious destiny.

It was thus that Odilo found her, when, three hours after dawn, he drew back the bolt of the hovel ; and having entered, and carefully secured the door behind him, approached his helpless victim. The lady neither spoke nor stirred ; and when he removed her hands, and clasping them between his own, poured forth a thousand vows, whose infamy should have blistered the lips that breathed

them, she sat as though she heard him not, with a wild look in her large eyes, and a compression of her livid lips which might have moved a demon to compassion. But Odilo had steeled himself to crime; and ere he had been in the forest another hour, loud shrieks, as of one in agony, rang through the depths of the leafy wilderness; and the monk stood before his Maker a branded and a blighted man!

Months passed by; and never once had the wretched Elika breathed the pure air of heaven, save at midnight when the grasp of her destroyer was on her arm. Yet she lived on; for she shrank from self-immolation with a pious horror; and having lost for ever all that could bless and hallow her present existence, she clung with tenacious earnestness to the hope of that which was to come. She no longer either struggled or reproached; her spirit was crushed within her; and a dull cold apathy, almost approaching to madness, settled upon her brain: while from day to day the fatal beauty which had been her destruction, faded and withered, until the conscience-stricken Odilo began to ask himself if this could be indeed *his* work!

Repentance came, however, too late ; her loveliness might fade, her life become the sacrifice to his sin, and he must look on in silence until the tragedy was completed ; for certain ruin would overtake him should his foul treachery be discovered : and thus from hour to hour he saw the finger of decay writing its remorseless characters upon the brow and brain of his young victim, without daring to make an effort to resist it.

Six tedious months had worn away—months weary and wretched beyond all that cruelty had ever before devised—when the maiden was awoke at midnight by a low crackling sound, and a hot sulphurous smell. In an instant she sprang from her bed, and a thought of horror swept across her brain. Was this indeed to be ? Was she to perish miserably by fire, after a life of suffering and despair ?

Again she rushed, maddened and frantic, to the door ; but what was her wild joy when it gave way before her. Her gaoler, when he brought her evening meal, had omitted to shoot the bolt ; and, with a shrill shriek, she bounded across the threshold, and plunged fearlessly into the underwood of the vast

forest. What had she to dread? Could any evil overtake her, like that from which she had just escaped? All her care was to hasten onward, beyond the reflection of the lurid flames which were now rising high and fierce towards the sky, and threatening to spread ruin and devastation round them.

Painful was the progress of the poor fugitive; for long confinement had deprived her of that suppleness of limb, and elasticity of motion, which she had once possessed; and she frequently fell to the ground in her struggles to penetrate the tangled undergrowth of the dense forest; but terror, and worse than death, were behind her; and she still held on her way, until a distant light beyond the confines of the wood, gleamed upon her enraptured sight like a beacon of salvation. Little dreamt the maiden, as she toiled downward along the mountain side, that the faint beam which was now her beacon of hope, was the same that had beguiled her to her ruin; but it was, indeed, the altar-taper of the chapel of Our Lady of Hope, illumined in honour of one of the multitudinous festivals of the Virgin, that now guided her steps.

It were vain to attempt a description of the feelings with which the wretched Elika at length recognised the mountain shrine. She had then escaped the grasp of her tormentor! She was near her home!—But how had she escaped? And what would be her welcome in that home, which she had involuntarily dishonoured?

Bitter was the groan with which, as these questions forced themselves upon her, the exhausted fugitive crossed the threshold of the chapel, and flung herself prostrate before the effigy of the Virgin, too faint to pray, too miserable to hope; when suddenly her ear, quickened to pain by the peril of her situation, detected a coming step; and springing to the door, she closed it violently, and extinguished, by the draught of air occasioned by the suddenness of the movement, the solitary light upon the altar. Our Lady had, indeed, yet more befriended her; for, as she flung the heavy door from her by a violent exertion of her failing strength, she had caused the spring by which it was secured to shoot the massive bolt into the groove.

That one last effort saved her; for ere long she heard the grumbling and hoarse voice of her late

gaoler, venting curses upon her activity ; nor was it more than a moment after she had again cast herself on the earth before the shrine, that she recognised the grasp of his strong hand upon the chapel door, which he shook violently, as if to assure himself that the same difficulty which impeded his own ingress, must also have prevented that of her whom he sought. Apparently satisfied with the result of his experiment, the charcoal-burner vented new and more bitter maledictions on her head, upon the very threshold of the shrine, and hurried away in renewed pursuit of his victim ; while she lay panting, trembling, and fainting, on the cold stone, until overwrought nature failed amid the struggle, and she lost consciousness.

On the morrow came the lay-brother of the monastery, whose duty it was to extinguish the holy taper, and to deck the altar of Our Lady of Hope ; and great was his consternation on beholding what he at first believed to be a dead female, prostrate before the shrine ; but suffering his charity to overcome his terror, he gently raised the maiden from the ground, bathed her pale brow with water from a neighbouring spring, and had, at length, the

satisfaction of seeing her eyes unclose, and a faint colour flicker about her cheek. Ere long the brother was plunged into still broader wonder; for he learnt from the lips of the attenuated being pillowed upon his arm, that she was the Lady Elika of Blatnitz, the missing daughter of the Baron; and an hour had scarcely elapsed ere they were on their way together, approaching by by-paths the fortress on the mountain.

Not a whisper did the maiden utter as they slowly ascended the rocky height, of the treachery of Odilo: she shuddered as she leant upon the arm of the humble lay-brother, for the same coarse serge met her eye which was worn by her inhuman destroyer; and full well she knew, that had he guessed the result of her re-appearance under the roof of her outraged father, he would not have scrupled to betray her, in order to save the credit of his community, and the life of his superior.

Thus, ignorant of the probable issue of the adventure, and believing that the lord of Blatnitz would amply reward the preserver of his long-lost daughter, the patient lay-brother carefully guided the steps of the sinking and shuddering girl, until

they had reached the castle. It was the hour of the morning meal ; and, with a hasty salutation to the monk, the busy attendants who were traversing the court-yard on various missions of usefulness, passed on, without casting a glance, or offering an inquiry, relative to his companion : and thus the two pilgrims entered the hall, and advanced to the foot of the well-covered board, before their appearance excited either attention or curiosity.

As her eye fell upon her parents, the heart of Elika sank within her, and her courage faltered for a moment ; but in the next she flung off her mantle, and knelt before them.

“ I come for vengeance !” she cried hastily, for her strength was nearly spent ; “ I, the ruin of what was once your child—your only one ; I have escaped from my prison ; from a bondage worse than captivity, to ask for vengeance before I die !”

Curses, such as the proud heart utters when it is trampled in the dust, burst from the lips of the Baron, as he pressed forward to raise his daughter, heedless that her broken-hearted mother had sunk into insensibility ; but with those curses were blent

the name of Illamer ; and ere he could reach her, the maiden had sprang aside, exclaiming :—

“ Unsay those bitter maledictions ; or pour them out upon the false head and the polluted spirit by which they have been earned. Curse not the dead. Illamer perished in an attempt to save your daughter from dishonour. The dagger of Odilo reached his heart, and there were none other to defend the outraged innocence. Look on me, Ye who hear me ! look on the offspring of your haughty lord. I am a thing accursed ! polluted ! ruined ! Father—mother—friends—revenge me, lest even in the grave I find no rest !”

As the unhappy girl shrieked out her maddened appeal, her arms fell powerless beside her, her head drooped upon her bosom, she fell prone upon the earth ere an arm could be outstretched to save her ; and, in the next instant, was raised a corse !

By order of the Baron, whose anguish deepened into rage as he looked upon the body of his child, recovered only to be lost for ever, the lady Elika was clothed in her most sumptuous apparel, and seated in a chair of state, before which knelt the infuriated father, and all his followers, while they

took the vow of vengeance which her dying lips had prompted ; and ere set of sun the lord of Znio, and his men-at-arms, summoned to Blattnitz by its chief, had performed the same frightful ceremony ; augmented by an oath to uproot from the earth the foul assassin of the young and brave Illamer.

Beside the corse, whose pale face and attenuated hands peeped forth from amid the jewels and brocade, as if in mockery of their magnificence, sat the mother of the dead maiden, tearless and silent ; she neither trembled nor expostulated, as those stern and steel-clad men performed their unnatural act of homage, and breathed their vows of vengeance ; but, at intervals, she gazed long and inquiringly at the mute figure beside her, as though she still doubted that this could, indeed, be all that remained to her of her once bright and beautiful Elika.

At midnight a band of armed men poured into the valley, and knocking loudly at the gate of the monastery, proclaimed to the astonished community, in the names of their powerful chiefs, the lords of Blattnitz and Znio, and those of all the neighbouring Barons who had been hastily summoned to assist

them in their work of retribution, that thenceforward the protection of the nobles was withdrawn from their brotherhood for ever, and their convent abandoned to the predatory occupants of the *pusztas*; while deep and undying feud was vowed against their order, so long as one stone remained standing upon another of the proud pile which had so long been their home.

The amazed and affrighted Abbot, immediately that the denunciation had been delivered, demanded a safe conduct to the fortress, which he with difficulty obtained; and when arrived there, he was at once conducted to the chamber of death; where, standing before the corse, he heard with burning cheek and quivering lip, the history of Elika's wrongs, and of Odilo's guilt.

Policy, as well as indignation, prompted his reply. He swore by his holy order, and by his patron saint, that justice should be done upon the guilty; and having, like the chieftains about him, vowed it upon the hand of the unconscious victim, he buried his face in his cowl, bent low before the assembled nobles, and withdrew.

But a short period had elapsed after the return

of the Abbot to his monastery, when the chapel bell pealed out, the chapter was convoked, and the recreant monk convicted of a crime so mighty, that the brotherhood as they listened, scarce dared to breathe while his polluted presence tainted the atmosphere.

Trembling, terror-stricken, and hopeless, Odilo on bent knees avowed his guilt—he pleaded passion; but the cowled listeners held his reasonings to be the mere ravings of a madman. He besought mercy; but, even as he did so, he felt that he who had never spared, could not, guilty as he was, hope for more than he had himself shewn to the innocent victim of his sin.

“Rise, sinner!” pealed out the Abbot, as the despairing wretch grovelled in the dust before him: “Rise, and receive the sentence of your crime. You have not now to learn the penality incurred by those who break the sacred seal of confession. The impious lips which dare to reveal the secrets of the holy chair must be closed for ever—And shall you,—the murderer, the seducer, and the traitor, dare to ask for mercy? Tremble, miscreant, at the fate which now awaits you. No prompt and ready

death, by which you may escape all save momentary suffering, but a lingering and just retribution for your sins."

The brotherhood heard and shuddered ; and within an hour the mouth of the wretched man was indeed closed for ever, though he yet lived ; the jaws being perforated by a sharp instrument, and then fastened together by a padlock, of which the key was flung into the rapid current of the Danube.

A few years ago some peasants, digging for spoil among the ruins of the monastery of Blattnitz, discovered the skeleton of a man seated upon a block of stone, within a niche formed in the thickness of the external wall of the building ; within his reach stood a vessel of coarse earth, which had evidently held water ; and his jaws were united by an iron padlock. That this instrument of torture had been applied on a living man, was evident from the marks of suppuration on the bone, which had come in contact with the iron ; and by the fact, that it was impossible to remove it without destroying the skull. And thus the truth of the tradition was confirmed ; and even the most sceptical ceased to doubt the story of Odilo, the Traitor-Monk.

CHAPTER V.

“ I CAN bear evidence to the fact ;” said the host, breaking the temporary silence which had succeeded the termination of the legend ; “ for I saw the skull not long ago in the Museum at Pesth,* and handled it with some curiosity, being, at first, inclined to believe that it might prove to be an ingenious deception. The more I examined this extraordinary human relic, however, the more I became convinced that the padlock had been applied during the lifetime of the victim. Nor is this the only one of the same description which they possess ; there being another of smaller size, but similarly locked together, and not quite so perfect as the larger specimen. I confess that I felt inclined to philosophise as I stood before them, and remarked that in one instance the jaws were both perfect,

* I myself saw the skull in question, and carefully examined it, as well as the other to which allusion is here made ; and no rational doubt can exist of their authenticity.

save where the introduction of the instrument had caused the suppuration of the bone, as though the victim had submitted to his fate with a stolid resolution, which even the agony of a lingering and frightful death had failed to shake: while in the other case there had evidently been resistance, even when it was too late; for the bone had been split and splintered, evidently from the efforts of the doomed wretch to free himself from the deadly thrall at any sacrifice of suffering; but in both cases the lock was so firmly closed, and had so rusted since it was applied, that it could only have been removed by the utter destruction of the skull."

"It is a horrible memento of human vengeance!" observed one of the party, with a shiver: "I almost wonder that its exhibition is tolerated."

"Rather call it a curious record of the past;" said the host; "for there is not anything palpably to disgust. A skull is at all times an unpleasant object; probably, in some sort, because it strikes at the root of our poor human vanities; for we are unable to delude ourselves with the hope, as we look upon it, that we shall escape this frightful penalty. But beyond the abstract horror which

human nature feels at every evidence of its own decay, these extraordinary memorials of old-world justice have no peculiar feature of disgust; nor are they to compare in my opinion, in this respect, with the plaster casts and wax effigies of murderers and murdered, that are exhibited for gain in some of those countries which esteem themselves as the most civilized and refined in Europe."

"The Baroness has in any case told us a most frightful tale;" said one of the ladies, shuddering; "and although we are greatly indebted to her for the exertion she has made, I confess that I for one shall not be sorry to become a listener to something more lively."

"You forget;" smiled the host; "that we are not to indulge in fiction, or we might conjure up bright fancies at your bidding; but to fall back upon the stern and struggling past, when the annals of our land were as gloomy as her fortunes. We should readily find in the clever volumes of Miklos, or the spirited pages of Joseph Eötvös, or the dramatic sketches of Vörösmarty, far gayer themes and more sparkling imaginings; but we are now raking together the ashes of our ancestors, and striving to elicit thence

a memory of their great deeds, their struggles, their wrongs, and their revenge ; and we cannot, therefore, hope that cheerfulness will be the hinge on which they revolve ; for it is too surely the fact, that the memory of happiness is so built up upon mere bright and changeful sensations, that it is like the rainbow which melts away into indistinctness, and leaves but a confused and diminished impression on the senses : whereas suffering, and feud, and all the sterner passages of man's life, are written as indelibly on the mind as acids eat into marble. We too often forget a friend ; but we hug the memory of an enemy until it grows into our souls."

" You are severe in your judgment of mankind, Baron," observed one of the guests.

" Not a whit ;" interposed another : " Do we not ever pay dues to the devil with an ungrudging hand ? And where is the forfeit from which he draws such goodly profit as from our hate ; unless, indeed, it be from our self-love ? The bond which links us together is our common interest ; and he who feels that his well-being is not concerned in the general good, will care little to maintain it. This is what men call selfishness ; and who shall hold up his

hand, and declare that he is exempt from it ? With him who did so, I should scarce know whether to laugh or weep, for he must be either a victim or a hypocrite. In the one case, wretched indeed are they who are driven to seek their draught of comfort from the shivered cistern of a heartless world ; and in the other, vile indeed must they be who could strive to build up a temple to their own worthiness, based upon the vices and follies of others, and upon their own falsehood."

" My husband is better than he seeks to seem ;" said a sweet voice near the Lady of Revay : " I pray you do not judge him by his words."

" I thank you for the rebuke, Blanche ;" replied the speaker : " They are not pretty phrases which I have been stringing together ; nor ought I, with such fair specimens of human nature as I now see about me, to have selected this precise moment for their utterance. I promise to offend no more."

" By St. Stephen ! I am glad to hear you say so ;" exclaimed Nicholas Palfy ; " for I began to fear that some of you were about to degenerate from metaphysics into politics ; and, in revenge for the non-assenbling of the Diet, to inundate us with

oratory. We have lost a vast deal of time already. I have seen more than one fair lip quiver with a yawn ; and as for myself”

“ *Gare, my Lord Count;*” laughed the host ; “ You will be a bolder man than any Palfy of them all, if you venture to confess to a yawn with the Lady Adèle by your side ! You would deserve to be stript of your spurs as a false knight.”

“ Nay, nay ; you cut me short ;” said the young man gaily. “ You metaphysicians will let no one talk but yourselves, so long as you see your way : it is only when you have tangled the thread of your discourse, that you suffer the interference of others, in order that amid their nonsense you may cover your own defeat.”

A merry laugh greeted this sally, in which the host and his supporter were the first to join ; and when it had subsided, the young Baron Treplitz suggested that some one should volunteer, as Palfy had done, to continue the narrations ; but as no single voice answered the appeal, he once more prepared to decide the succession by lot ; and the chance fell upon M. D’Eödenffy, a pale young man, whose long light hair fell in thick masses upon

his cheeks, and low into his neck. He had just completed his studies at Heidelberg, where he had gained considerable credit, both for his steady application and his unusual talent; but it was easy to see that the flame was already flickering in the lamp, and that the first rude breath would suffice to extinguish it. There was a restless wildness of demeanour about him, too, that even while it excited interest, had, nevertheless, something repellent in it. His eyes were large, but of the palest gray; and would have been expressionless had they not at times gleamed with a strange and preternatural brightness, that for the moment lit them up with a fierce and painful lustre, such as might be supposed to accompany insanity. His voice was low, deep, and musical; his manner subdued and monotonous; and his habits so retired, that it had been at the express desire of his father, who was anxious to arouse him from so unwholesome a mood of mind, that he had been included among the guests at the castle, to all of whom he had alike been an object of interest and curiosity.

"I scarcely know how to meet this emergency;" he said, in his low passionless voice: "My existence

is rather one of thought than words, and I fear that I shall string them together loosely. I have listened to wild legends many times, and loved them well; but they have not lingered with me; nor would they perhaps serve my purpose now, could I recal them." And as he spoke, he shook back his long hair, and fixed his large gleaming eyes upon the embers on the hearth; apparently unconscious or indifferent to the earnest looks that were fastened on him, while he seemed to be endeavouring to renew some faded memory.

After a time he evidently succeeded; for he withdrew his gaze from the fire, thrust the long bony fingers of his right hand into his breast, and sweeping the saloon with a quick and eager look, observed with a faint smile: "Dark shadows flit along the earth even in the brightest day, and they pass away, and are forgotten, without having marred the glory of the hour: this is a cheering truth to me, for it gives me courage, and I am content to be that passing cloud; glooming, but only for a moment, over the bloom and beauty which can but be heightened by the contrast."

THE BANQUET OF WINNA.

The mountainous portion of Hungary, which stretches to the north-east, is not only rich in natural beauty, but is also replete with historical associations of deep national interest ; for it was in the county of Urgher that the chivalrous Magyars first made their descent, when they swept like an avalanche from the girdling heights, over the fertile plains of Pannonia.*

One of the most picturesque ruins of the district, is that of the Castle of Winna ; which, although less extensive than many in the country, was formerly of great strength ; it stands to the north of the great road leading from Nagy-Michaly to Szobrantz, on the summit of a precipitous rock, at whose base nestles the borough that took its name from the fortress to which it owed its existence ; and from family feuds and other causes, grew into some importance, both from its extent, and the strength of several fortified dwellings inhabited by the kinsmen of the Baron.

The petty sovereign who lorded it over this little feudal state, was a soldier of considerable renown,

* Ancient name of Hungary.

who had played a distinguished part in the convulsive drama of the seventeenth century, and who had gained a signal victory over the Turkish forces. The Baron Eödenffy had been the chief captain of the pretender, John Zápolya, and was subsequently commander-in-chief of the legitimate successor of the Jagellons, King Ferdinand, Vice-Waywode of Transylvania.

Left an orphan at a very early age, Stephen Eödenffy was consigned to the care of a harsh and tyrannical guardian, ill calculated to assume the charge which had devolved on him, of controlling and directing a nature so peculiar as that of the boy-baron. Even from infancy, the child had given evidence of a bold and undaunted spirit, over which neither peril nor threatenings possessed the slightest influence ; while, blent with this indomitable courage, there was a visionary and mystic melancholy about the youth as he advanced in years, which seemed still more the effect of nature than of study ; although his best-loved lore was that which taught wild and supernatural knowledge, and brought down the world of spirits to the earth on which he trod.

Such was the orphan when, revolted by the vio-

lence and harshness of his guardian, he fled almost penniless, and utterly unknown, from the ungenial hearth of his childhood, into the midst of a world where he resolved to earn for himself a proud name, and the sympathy of his fellow-beings ; or, by losing his now valueless life, lay down with it all the high aspirations and noble yearnings which had made the walls of his ancestral castle those of a dungeon ; with heaviness within, and hope without.

This bold spirit drove him at once into the profession of arms ; and he shared in all the pomps and perils of the Thirty Years' war against the French and Swedes ; and ultimately fought in the ill-fated revolt of Rákotzy. Amid this tumultuous career, he necessarily became a wanderer on the face of the earth, without a home or a tie save the camp of the leader whom he followed : repeated triumphs endeared his chosen profession to him more and more : while his observant and contemplative disposition enabled him, even amid the turmoil of arms, to acquire a store of that practical and rational knowledge, which is the real mean of intellectual power. Intrinsically a soldier, the Baron Eödenffy was not the less calculated for a statesman ; and when he drew his sword, it was because he desired to aid the

cause he espoused, rather than to profit personally by its success.

But while the Baron was earning for himself a proud name among the first warriors of Europe, his greedy kinsmen were profiting by his absence, and by the total silence which he had maintained towards his family ever since his flight; and possessing themselves by slow but sure degrees of his patrimony: until at length, when wearied by a life of perpetual vicissitude and exertion, he resolved to devote the remainder of his days to solitude and study, he discovered that the somewhat dilapidated castle of Winna, with its immediate dependencies, was the only portion of his hereditary property which had escaped the grasp of cousins, nephews, and even kinsmen of more remote relationship.

But Eödenffy had seen strife enough throughout his life to render him averse to bringing the curse of contention to the home of his grey hairs; and consequently, not more to the surprise than to the gratification of his self-elected representatives, he left them all in peaceful possession of their usurped advantages, after a few quiet expostulations; and shut himself up in the castle on the rock, with no other companion than an

old and attached soldier, who had followed his fortunes from the commencement of his stormy career; while the town at the mountain-foot remained parcelled out among his relatives; and several neighbouring fortresses, which had formerly been dependencies of the stronghold of Winna, and to which he was the rightful heir, and should have been the feudal lord, were garrisoned by the alienated retainers of Eödenffy, and frowned defiance on the hoary and time-touched pile to which they had hitherto been in vassalage.

Once satisfied that they had nothing to fear from his hostility, the kinsmen of the Baron, while they sneered at his supineness, and made merry over his careless concessions, resolved, nevertheless, to keep up at least a show of courtesy; and to favour the head of their family with their countenance and society, although they had defrauded him of his patrimony. But the eagle who had suffered them unpunished to pluck the best feathers from his wing, would not permit them to ascend to his mountain eyrie, with the spoil waving above their brows in mockery; and thus, when they would have forced themselves into his presence, he rejected their advances.

The drawbridge of Winna had been drawn up immediately that the Baron and his attendants had passed it, when they took possession of the castle ; nor had it since been lowered, though the bugle had been blown more than once by every scion of the house of Eödenffy in turn.

All was speculation throughout the neighbourhood ; for from the day of the Baron's arrival at Winna, no eye had seen either him or his attendant, save once or twice at twilight, when they were dimly distinguished together, watching the rise of the moon at her full, and then apparently gathering wild herbs, with strange and unintelligible gesticulations.

A thousand rumours grew with time. Some had seen witch-lights dancing along the ramparts ; others had watched vapoury figures stealing from casement to casement, and lighting up each as they passed with a pale blue flame ; and soon, not a storm burst upon the valley, overflowing the river, and sweeping down the corn crops, but forgetting that these had been frequent for years, it was attributed to the hermit-lord and his sorcerer-attendant.

Years passed on ; and then, even these follies died away ; and people almost ceased to think of the extraordinary man who had once been the constant theme of converse and conjecture : they had left him, as they said, to his fate ; forgetting that he had shaped his own ; and, meanwhile, the gray old castle crumbled away in silence, as though no human foot ever trod its mouldering battlements.

Things were in this position when official business, connected with the government of the kingdom, induced the then Prince-Palatine, Francis Wesséleny, to visit the borough of Winna. The advent of so celebrated a personage created an intense sensation throughout the province ; for, independently of his high rank, the Palatine was an object of earnest curiosity to all the fair and high-born dames far and near, from his bold wooing of Maria Lzetsi ; whom, resolute to win, he besieged in the castle of Murange, in the hope of securing by force that consent, which of her free will she had denied ; for, although each and all cried shame, and affected both horror and indignation at so coercive a mode of courtship, they did so in such soft tones, and with such applaudive smiles, that

Wesséleny felt no apprehension of losing his popularity.

The most considerable fortress in the neighbourhood, then tenanted by the widow of a kinsman of the Baron, was selected as the temporary home of the Palatine; and thither he was accordingly conducted with much ceremony, immediately on his arrival. The lady was as remarkable for her beauty, as for a certain stinging wit, which was not the less based on a bitter and malicious feeling, that it never failed to excite the smiles and applause of her listeners. She had been the most virulent relative of the recluse Baron, simply because she knew that her late husband had been one of those who had the most deeply wronged him; and that she was indebted to his spoils for the magnificence in which she lived. But all her sarcasm had failed to draw down the vengeance of Eödenffy: he had never known another mistress than glory; and he despised women as mere painted triflers, only calculated to amuse the idle and the weak, as the butterfly attracts the mindless urchin; and, consequently, her smiles and blandishments had availed nothing on their first meeting; while the malice of a thing so

insignificant, affected him no more than the fall of a mass of pumice on the living rock ; and thus the widowed Châtelaine sighed for a double vengeance, to satisfy at once her slighted beauty and her despised wit.

The visit of the Palatine promoted the long looked-for opportunity ; and it was consequently, with undisguised satisfaction, that she heard her own castle named as his temporary residence ; and made preparations for his fitting reception. Nor was Wesséleny less contented with the arrangement ; for, unlike the self-secluded Baron, he was by no means insensible to female captivations ; and he read in the bright eyes of his hostess so full and undoubted a welcome, that even as he sprang from the saddle, and offered her his hand to re-ascend the stair at the foot of which she had stood to receive him, he assured himself that even in the secluded province of Urgher, it might be quite possible for the gorgeous Palatine himself to spend a few days without positive *ennui*.

Nor was this impression diminished, as he took his seat at the board, with the beautiful Baroness beside him, and his suite, mingled with the nobles of the

neighbourhood in his company. Wine and wit were alike profusely poured forth ; and the fine intellect and buoyant spirits of the brilliant Wesséleny, were forced into full play by the sarcastic malice of the widow.

Brighter eyes never lent deeper meaning to words, and whiter hands never gave added flavour to the draughts they proffered ; no wonder therefore that the susceptible Palatine was dazzled, and drained them willingly to the health of so fair a hostess.

The widow seized so favourable a moment for the furtherance of her project, and directing the attention of her princely guest to the casement, she bade him remark how brightly the risen moon had robed in silver the gray and grim old castle of her strange kinsman, Stephen Eödenffy.

Wesséleny, having first pressed to his lips the white and slender fingers which were still pointing towards the rock ; rose from the banquet, and accompanied his hostess to the window, whence they stepped forth upon a balcony, from which they could distinguish the whole outline of the rock-fortress, now pencilled gloriously in light against the deep purple sky of midnight. It was a strange

contrast to the scene of glare and revelry they had just left! All was calm and still : the long shadows of the mountains lay like weary giants along the earth ; while every spot flooded by the moonlight shone out like a fairy islet, where the beautiful spirits of the rainbow and the stream might love to disport themselves ; for all sound there stole upon the ear the low wind-whispers of the leaves, and the sighing of the river-ripple, as it swept slowly between its banks ; save when at intervals a peal of riotous laughter escaped from the open casement of the banqueting room to scare the quiet of the silent earth ; and, towering above every other object, rose the Castle of Winna, like the guardian genius of the scene.

The spirit of Wesséleny was calmed at once by the solemn beauty which surrounded him : a sigh heaved his breast, the smile faded from his lip, and it was almost in a whisper, that he asked—

“ And yonder pile of evanishing silver, has it no tenant to feast upon such magnificence as this? Is not Eödenffy there ?”

“ So we suppose, my lord : ” was the reply, murmured in an accent as subdued as his own.

"Suppose! fair dame.—Is he not your near kinsman? And are you not cognizant of his neighbourhood?"

"I am only mortal, prince; and my sorcerer-cousin holds no communion with mere flesh and blood."

"Nay, now you surely jest, madam;" said Wesselény hastily, and almost in a tone of rebuke: "and in good truth the accusation is somewhat too stern for sport, even though the lips that utter it be of the loveliest. Why was the Baron not here to greet me? Did none apprise him of my coming?"

"Again I repeat, my lord, that there was no need;" replied the Baroness: "Scant courtesy could Stephen Eödenffy have shown your Highness, who for the last fifteen years has been shut up in yonder castle (which is gradually becoming as dark and grim as its lord!), with one solitary attendant; existing none know how, and all have ceased to care; and totally unseen, save when at intervals he occasionally appears with his mysterious companion in the moonlight, and seems to perform some mystic rite."

"Why, by St. Stephen! if it be so indeed, surely

yonder he moves"—exclaimed the Palatine; "There—where the moonlight rests upon the rampart—and—yes, there are two of them—on what are they engaged?"

"That may I not decide, my gracious prince, for none can read their gestures; but mark how fast the light fails them, and with what apparent eagerness they search for some object which eludes their sight! You have now looked upon the sole tenants of the once formidable fortress of Winna."

"Why, this is strange!" murmured Wesséleny: "He was so brave a soldier! So ready with his good weapon when he loved his cause! What can this mean? I would fain speak with him, and strive to chase this whimsey from his brain."

"In such case," remarked the widow hastily, having now accomplished the object which she had at heart; "your Highness has but to make your inclination known. No good Hungarian will dare to close his gates against Francis Wesséleny; nay, I cannot believe that any would seek to do so: and even although my cousin Stephen may play the churl to his own kinsmen, he will, no doubt, prove a willing and an eager host to the Prince-Palatine."

How say you, sir? Will you condescend to offer yourself as his guest at to-morrow's mid-day meal? You will, at least, shame him into more generous housekeeping; and may revenge your insulted appetite at my poor board on your return."

"It shall be so:" said Wesséleny; "it is a happy scheme, for I must see this dark Baron face to face before I leave the province; I thank you for the project."

"I will dispatch a messenger at dawn, my lord, to herald your approach; but dare not pledge myself that his errand will be answered. And now, will you in to rest? Your chamber is prepared, and you have scant time for repose."

As the lady spoke she led the way back into the hall; and, ere long, none were waking throughout the fortress save the sentinels who kept watch upon the walls.

Scarcely was it dawn when a horseman might have been seen to take his way across the valley, and to commence the difficult ascent of the castle-crowned rock of Winna. He was yet half asleep, for the heavy fumes of the preceding night's banquet had not yet rolled away from his oppressed brain;

and he travelled slowly, like one who felt that he had been dispatched on a bootless errand, and had no anxiety to know its issue.

After two weary hours of travel—for the long-untrodden path up the rock had become still more arduous from disuse, and the fall of loose stones from the building had in places blocked up the way, and rendered extreme caution not only advisable, but imperative—the envoy at length arrived at the edge of the chasm, above which the drawbridge hung suspended by its rusty chains; and had just put his bugle to his lips to sound the *appel*, when Eödenffy himself appeared upon the walls, and welcomed him in as courteous phrase as might have become the lips of a state page.

Nor was his message less graciously received. “Tell Francis Wesséleny;” he said, “that I was prepared to hear from him. He was too brave a soldier to forget an old companion in arms; and too high-hearted a prince to show disrespect to grey hairs. To-morrow at mid-day I shall await him here; but, on my side, I pray him not to come alone. There is room enough for all in the old castle of Winna; he, and his suite, and all the guests by

whom it may please him to be accompanied. This for the prince; while, for thy mistress, I have also a mission. Say to that noble lady, that for the credit of our name, I earnestly entreat her to accompany his Highness, and to do the honours of my poor house. Fear not to overcrowd me. Again, I say that there is room enough; men and horses, fair dames and delicate palfreys, I shall gladly welcome all on so proud an occasion as the visit of Francis Wesséleny."

Great was the surprise of the messenger; and, for some instants after the Baron had disappeared from the walls he still remained motionless, doubting the evidence of his own senses. But, at length, he slowly tightened the bridle of his horse, and turning its head from the castle, prepared to return into the valley.

The astonishment of the envoy, however, was poor and tame compared to that of the noble company in whose presence he delivered his message. To his mistress it was a mystery which baffled all conjecture; she dreaded treachery; she anticipated vengeance; but she dared not explain to the Palatine her reasons for these suspicions; and, there-

fore, she only sought to turn him from his purpose of visiting the Baron, by painting with such graphic touches the probable state of the castle buttery and cellar, as made the pulses of many a court follower flutter with anticipating horror : for when, in her malicious hate, she had suggested this proceeding to the prince, she had foreseen nothing save refusal on the part of her kinsman, and consequent displeasure on that of the Palatine ; and, although she could not fathom the intentions of the mysterious recluse, she was too well aware of her wrongs towards him, not to feel that she was caught in her own toils ; and that, come what might, it could bode no good to her.

But Wesséleny was not to be turned from his purpose by the terrors of an insufficient meal, and he smilingly withheld all the expostulations by which he was assailed ; and to which he only replied, by reminding the recusants that the hours were wearing fast away, and that there was barely time, after the morning meal, to make a fitting toilette for so rare a feast as that to which they were bidden.

All flippancy on the subject of the Baron and his

mood was at an end ; and the Palatine, who loved to study human nature under all its phases, promised himself at least as much diversion from the disgust of the fasting courtiers, as from the waywardness and poverty of their host : and, unconscious of the legitimate cause for dread which blanched the roseate cheek of the Baroness to an ashen whiteness, he jested with her as they prepared to depart, on the probable scantiness of their coming entertainment ; and the consequent havoc which would ensue when they once more found themselves beside her hospitable board.

The lady, however, was in no mood for merriment ; and although she compelled herself to reply by a courteous smile, and an assurance of the gratification she felt in the prospect of such honour, the words arose not glibly to her lips ; and their ride was by no means a cheerful one.

They were a gorgeous, and a numerous company ; for Wesséleny had insisted that all should share one common fate : and as they swept across the valley, the sun glinted on polished armour, and the breeze wantoned with flowing plumes ; while the occasional neighing of the pampered horses sounded cheerily as

they bounded over the green sward. Then commenced the steep ascent of the rock ; and the hand of Wesséleny was on the bridle-rein of the Baroness, while two pages walked beside her palfrey. A man-at-arms preceded them bearing a shield, on which was displayed the arms of the Palatine : the maidens of the lady followed close after their mistress, carefully aided in their ascent by the nobles ; and a troop of armed retainers, at the suggestion of the anxious cousin of Eödenffy, brought up the rear.

When they reached the summit of the mountain, they found the drawbridge already lowered, the portcullis raised, and a couple of warders stationed at the gate in gorgeous uniforms of the national colours, crimson, green, and white ; while in the court-yard a numerous body-guard were drawn up, who presented arms to the Palatine as he passed under the arch, amid the flourish of a score of brazen trumpets.

The old servant who had followed the Baron from the wars, and whom, from the silver key which he wore in his girdle, they recognised as the seneschal of the castle, received them on the lowest

step of the hall ; and held the stirrup of the prince while he alighted, and the bridle of the lady when Wesséleny lifted her from her saddle ; and then, ere he led the way into the building, he obsequiously kissed the hilt of the Palatine's diamond-studded sabre, and found time to turn upon the conscious Baroness a glance which froze her blood.

Accustomed as he was to magnificence, Wesséleny looked around him in wonder. Silken banners, hoisted at the moment of his arrival, streamed from the towers ; grooms were already busied in leading away the horses of the guests ; servants in gorgeous liveries lined the stairs, by which they were to ascend to the hall ; and an aspect not only of opulence, but of sovereignty, pervaded the whole establishment.

On the first landing, the seneschal disappeared ; and the Palatine, who followed by his whole company gallantly led the lady onward, was met, and silently saluted, by a little old man, clad in flowing robes of gray silk, so precisely of the same tint as his hair and the beard which depended far below his waist, that his extraordinary appearance caused the prince to pause and address him : but the sig-

nificant gesture with which he pointed to his lips and shook his head, intimating that he was a mute, compelled the illustrious guest to restrain his curiosity, at least for a time.

Nevertheless, Wesséleny could not forbear scanning him closely. His movements, as he led the way towards the interior of the castle, were rapid and active enough for youth ; and yet, had it not been for the restlessness of his clear gray eyes, his countenance was as impassive as though it had been carved in marble. Those eyes, once as he moved on, were averted, and fixed upon the Baroness ; and if she had been moved by the glance of the old seneschal, she was now, though she knew not why, petrified with horror by that fixed and searching gaze. A sudden chill made her shiver ; the marrow seemed frozen within her bones ; and a hand of ice appeared to be clutching at her heart : then, as the eyes were once more averted, and the mysterious guide became again wholly absorbed in his task of marshalling them the way, a long-drawn sigh came to her relief, and the painful symptoms disappeared.

Soon, indeed, was the shock forgotten, in her amazement at the proud splendour of the vast suite

of rooms through which they were slowly passing ; offering, as they did, so incredible a contrast from the poor and perishing exterior of the building, and seeming so greatly to exceed its apparent extent. There was, however, little time afforded even for this astonishment ; for suddenly a flourish of trumpets and kettle-drums, proceeding from invisible musicians, welcomed the Palatine and his suite to the banqueting-hall, at whose entrance stood the Baron Eödenffy, whose noble bearing alone distinguished him as the master of the feast, for his dress was squalid, even to meanness, and he wore no single emblem of his rank ; while the wide and noble hall, whence the light of day had been carefully excluded by curtains of purple velvet fringed heavily with gold, was one blaze of splendour.

Torches of sandal and cedar wood, clustered against the tapestried walls, yielded at once brilliancy and perfume : music, soft and low, as the sighing of the summer wind among roses, and coming no one knew whence, while it filled the whole of the vast apartment with its sweetness, thrilled to the spirits of the listeners : a board, heaped with all the rarest viands which a Sardanapalus could have

gathered together, served upon massive dishes of gold and silver, was rendered yet more inviting by the delicious wines of Tokay, Buda, and the Rhine-land, gleaming in amber and ruby, in spacious goblets of many-coloured crystal, or vases of the precious metals, lipped and studded with jewels; and interspersed with baskets of coral and opal, filled with ripe and luscious fruits, such as are found in far lands, where the sun is brightest, and nature revels in vegetable luxury.

Their welcome uttered, the princely Wesséleny embraced his mysterious host; and then the Baron courteously saluted his anxious kinswoman, who almost expected each moment that the earth would open beneath her feet: and the greeting over, a chorus of sweet voices summoned the party to the banquet, where Eödenffy seated the Baroness at the head of the board, beneath a canopy of crimson velvet, on which were embroidered the arms of their noble house in many-coloured gems; and having led the Palatine to her right hand, and placed himself on her left, the remainder of the guests were seated, each according to his rank. But, wonder of wonders! the feast had scarce began, when

through a door at the lower end of the hall passed in a group of young and lovely maidens, clad in the oriental fashion, with long hair streaming to the earth, and large eyes flashing out like an eastern midnight from beneath their heavy turbans, who commenced a dance so wildly graceful, to the measure of their own soft voices and the silver bells of their tambourines, that many a reveller forbore for awhile the banquet, to gaze upon the bright visions of loveliness thus suddenly presented to him.

And so the feast proceeded: every want anticipated by the crowd of richly-liveried servants, who moved noiselessly among the guests, until most of the company suffered the languishing dances, and the soft music, and the luxurious wines, to take their reason captive; but Wesséleny was fortified against fascination of all kinds by long custom; and even amid this splendid revel he led back the converse of his host to the days when they had been companions in arms, and leagued together in the same cause. Nor was Eödenffy reluctant to recur to those proud years when his name had been a watchword among the brave; and he talked so eloquently of past times, that no one heeded, save the

lady herself, how cunningly he engrafted upon his subject, sarcasms so bitterly levelled against her cupidity and extortionate dishonesty and malice, that she writhed as she listened.

At length the Palatine became aware that the day was drawing to its close ; and, after cordially acknowledging the magnificent hospitality of his host, he rose to depart, amid a chorus of exclamations from his now half-intoxicated followers, in honour of a feast which all declared never to have been surpassed.

Eödenffy did not seek to detain his guests. In a few moments the tramp of their horses was heard in the court-yard, amid the shouting of the retainers and men-at-arms, who were evidently even more under the influence of the Baron's good cheer, than their less boisterous masters. Parting salutations were proffered and returned ; and as the goodly company sallied forth, and traversed the drawbridge, the Lady Eödenffy offered up a mental thanksgiving to her patron saint that she had, contrary to her anticipation, escaped unscathed from the clutches of her wizard kinsman.

Once past the boundary of the castle walls, the

merry revellers began to bandy jests and surmises on the subject of their late host, and his princely household ; and their laughter rang out loud and clear on the evening air, intermingled with snatches of drinking or hunting songs, until they suddenly discovered that by some extraordinary chance they had deviated from the right track in descending the mountain, and arrived on the verge of a vast forest, several leagues distant from the town of Winna.

On inquiry of the attendants, who were no less bewildered than their lords, it was decided that the most direct and prudent measure would be to re-commence the ascent of the castle-rock, and to endeavour to regain, as soon as might be, the track from which they had so strangely deviated : and accordingly, the cavalcade forthwith began to retrace their steps, and to compel their reluctant horses once more to the toilsome path from which they had just emerged.

On they went, mile after mile, however ; and still no vestige could they discover of the cross-road which should have conducted them to the town in the valley ; and thus, just as the sun disappeared from the sky, leaving his amber banners floating in

the west, they drew up their panting horses once more on the edge of the castle ditch.

But vainly did they sound the bugle to summon a sentinel to the walls, through whom they might crave of his lord a guide into the plain : all was dark and silent ; the heavy drawbridge was drawn up, the ponderous portcullis lowered ; song, and dance, and revel had disappeared ; no banner now floated from the battlements, no music echoed from the halls ; and after a second attempt to rouse the inmates of the gloomy pile, which proved as abortive as the first, the Palatine deemed it expedient to put his party into motion once more, ere the fast-fading twilight deepened into night.

Hours did they spend thus ; trying every track which they could still discern, until darkness gathered about them, and their only light was the unsteady twinkle of the myriad stars, which seemed to mock their perplexity. Thrice did they find themselves before the entrance of the castle, whence they had so merrily departed after the banquet ; and thrice did they re-descend into the valley, only to flounder in quagmires, or get bewildered amid the forest ; while, superadded to this strange and un-

accountable annoyance, a keen and gnawing hunger grew upon the whole party, and they felt rather like men at the close of a long penance-fast, than revellers, who not many hours previously had feasted even to repletion.

Their amazement became excessive, however, when, on the avowal of some of their followers that they had brought away a few fragments of the good cheer, they prepared to profit by this unlooked-for fortune, and found that the precious edibles had been mysteriously transformed into ashes and remnants of broken glass.

The cry of sorcery was raised : but it availed them nothing to know that they had been, and still were, the victims of an unholy and devilish imposture. The conviction neither appeased their cravings, nor put them into the track which would have led them homeward ; and thus throughout the night they wandered hungry, weary, and bewildered ; their courtly garments torn by brambles, and encrusted with mud ; and their jaded horses panting and trembling under them, until at length the dawn relieved them from their irksome uncertainty ; and while it displayed their dishonoured and forlorn

condition, also gave them a distant view of the towers and roofs of the town and fortress of Winna.

All thought of vengeance was deferred, for famine and fatigue engrossed the whole company; and it was not until they had yielded to the claims of both, that the Palatine caused a council to be called; where it was unanimously resolved that the sorcerer-baron should deliver himself up to the authority of the prince, to be dealt with as he in his justice might see fit: and in pursuance of this decision, an envoy was dispatched to the castle on the rock; whose errand was, however, bootless, for on arriving before it, he found the drawbridge lowered, and splintered in the centre, so that all passage across it was impossible; while the only response that he received to his summons were peals of mocking laughter, which made both himself and his horse shiver as they listened.

From that time forth, neither the Baron Eödenffy nor his attendant were ever seen again; but the wild and derisive laughter may be heard to ring out even to this day, if the inquisitive visitor happen to chance upon the precise moment of its explosion.

CHAPTER VI.

THE strange story of the student was told; and it had been well suited to the hour, for midnight had sounded during its progress, that “witching time of night,” to which all sorcery and mephistophilism is peculiarly appropriate. Various were the opinions on its merits, and they were freely given, but the pale youth took no part in the discussion; he had fulfilled his task, and he sank back at once into his ordinary cold and dreamy silence.

“For my own part;” said Palfy, “I have a passion for the supernatural. This working-day world is so full of common-place, that I confess to a strong pique against the rationalists, who reduce everything to the test of reason, and rob us of all the mystery and mysticism enjoyed by our great-grandfathers. What a pretty illusion was dispelled when the besom of philosophy swept away the fairies! Though we are consoled in some degree for their absence, by the possession of their still more

lovely human sisters ; but what can atone to us for the loss of all the shadowy train of spectres who in former years occasionally performed exploits that would have done credit to tangible flesh and blood ? ”

“ Why not enumerate among your regrets the familiar visits of his satanic majesty ? ” asked the host smiling.

“ Why not, indeed ? ” echoed Palfy ; “ for upon the showing of some of our old historians and chroniclers, he had a very pretty notion of honour and justice, and occasionally conducted himself in a thoroughly gentlemanlike manner, as far as principle is concerned. I will give you a case in point, if you will let me.”

“ Oh, by all means ; ” exclaimed several voices simultaneously : “ it will be a worthy finale to the evening.”

“ I will endeavour to make it so ; ” said the Count : and after a smile from the Lady Adèle, who looked up from her eternal embroidery frame, where she was working an elaborate bouquet in floss silks, which had made but slow progress since it had divided her attention with Nicholas Palfy, he commenced somewhat sententiously :—

“ Among the number of those, who, full of projects, or guiltless of reflection ; absorbed in business, or enjoying a comfortable idleness ; were once wont on every succeeding day to pass through the great square of the populous city of Presburg, there were, probably, very few who paused to remark on the front of the town-hall, the striking fresco-painting which surmounted the door.

“ I may be, perhaps, permitted to mention, *en passant*, that the edifice itself is stated to have existed during the dynasty of the Arpads : and it is asserted in some ancient documents, that since the year 1388, it has always been the municipal council-house of this second capital of Hungary ; a fact which, could it be clearly established, would ensure to it the reputation of a very respectable antiquity.

“ It underwent, say the same authorities, great alterations and embellishments under Ferdinand the First, in 1547 ; and it was at that period that the reliefs still existing in some of the apartments, and over the principal entrance, were added to the decorations of the building.

“ It is to that age also that belong the narrow and pointed Gothic windows, which occupy the whole

length of the façade, of which two, precisely similar, stand out above the door, and form a sort of balcony.

“ Immediately beside that on the right hand as you face the edifice, was a painting in fresco, which represented in the brightest and freshest colours, that looked as though the weather had never touched them, the figure of an aged man in a flowing robe of black falling in heavy folds about his person, with a beard as white as silver descending to his girdle; absorbed in a book which lay open before him. The whole was the size of life, but the figure was only seen in mid-length, with its back turned towards one of the small windows of the balcony.

“ It was asserted, however, that this was not always its position while it was still numbered among the living, and that the frightful measure of its crimes had not yet overflowed. Often did it look forth from this very window upon the busy stir of the wide square beneath, as the treacherous spider looks from its crafty web upon the unsuspecting and heedless flies who float in giddy circles near the web intended to entrap them.

“ This picture, which had the reputation of

having endured for centuries, was the portrait of a citizen of Presburg, and its municipal counsellor; and the artist was the Devil, who in one moment accomplished a work which neither the power of time, nor the efforts of man, sufficed to obliterate.

" And now for its history——

" I would fain remark with your permission, Count," said the host, " that, however well you may tell the tale, there is one circumstance——"

" Not a word more, or you seal my lips;" interposed Palfy: " I care not a pin for your objection; and unless you would mar my tale, keep your cavil till it is told."

A good-humoured nod of acquiescence was the reply, and the narrator resumed.

" Towards the end of the fourteenth century, during the reign of King Rudolph (whose career was marked by misfortune), there lived at Presburg a certain man, from whose keen eye and imperious will, no business, whether public or private, of any inhabitant of the city, could be concealed. This was the more irritating, as none either loved or respected him; and such was the general avoidance in which he was held, that it was impossible to form

any conjecture as to whence he obtained his knowledge of the secrets which he brought to bear upon the fortunes of all around him. His features were fine, but impassive as though they had been wrought in stone ; his forehead was high and smooth, and not a trace of either time or passion had graven its passage there ; his lips scarcely parted when he spoke ; and the voice which issued from between them was deep and hollow, like a murmur in a sepulchre ; but from beneath his heavy eyebrows flashed forth lightnings, which made a tempest of his countenance, and spoke of evil impulses within.

“ He had arrived in the city a poor and unknown lad, no one knew whence ; and in the course of years he had made his way to the first dignities of the council, no one knew how. He had neither friends, nor funds, nothing but his own personal resources ; and yet all gave way before him, no one knew why. Everything that was confided to his management was sure to prosper, however unpromising it had previously appeared ; and all opposition to his will entailed failure, however safe it had previously seemed. What he desired came to pass ; resistance to his fiat never met mercy ; and the

ruin of his opposers became a lesson and a warning to their fellow-citizens.

“ His triumph was now complete : he was hated, but he was obeyed ; he was feared, but he was trusted ; none any longer attempted to conceal from him the most cherished secrets of their lives, for they felt that the effort would be not only vain, but fatal ; every man’s heart was laid bare before him, and his own was hidden from all. He lived alone, receiving greedily, and giving grudgingly : laying up treasures, none knew why nor for whom ; and coveting the wealth of others, though he lacked the will to enjoy his own. One wretched hag, bent with years and infirmities, composed his household ; but even to her he never spoke save in bitterness. Astrology, with its wild chimeras, and the sublimer study of the stars, occupied all his leisure ; and it was whispered at many a hearth that he was a foul magician, who had bartered his soul to Satan, at a price which must one day be paid.

“ On a particular occasion the municipal council of the city held a meeting for the purpose of hearing, investigating, and redressing grievances ; and of delivering over to justice the tyrant and the oppressor.

Suddenly a woman, poor, and bowed down by affliction, burst into the hall, and without preface or hesitation, at once addressed the tribunal. ‘In toil and suffering,’ she exclaimed; ‘in sickening toil, and heavy suffering; by braving hunger, thirst, the rage of the elements, and the persecutions of those who were happier and more prosperous than ourselves, did my husband and I succeed in existing by the labour of our hands, and the produce of a small piece of land adjoining to the estate of a wealthy citizen. Three days ago the weary illness of my husband ended in death; and my proud neighbour, to increase and beautify his rich possessions, has torn from me my little field. I appeal to heaven, and to this noble court, to protect me against this outrage, and to save me from utter ruin; aye, even although my enemy should hold a place among my judges; even although he should be that very one whom we all fear, while we know not wherefore! ’

“None asked her whom she meant; but each looked upon his neighbour in silence, as if to read his thoughts, even while he shrank from giving utterance to his own; and the pause was ultimately

terminated by the accused himself, who, with the same cold smile upon his lip, and the same wild sparkle in his eye which were habitual there, drew from his breast a strip of parchment, and in the calm soulless monotony of tone which was peculiar to him, read aloud a formal deed, which went to prove that for some secret service, but darkly hinted, he had ceded, years ago, the disputed land to the husband of the weeping woman—ceded it for his life, without mention of those who might live after him—for his natural life, which had now ceased; and, as he refolded the parchment, he went on to state, that on the death of his pensioner he had a right to reclaim his own, by that law which none could either impede or resist.

“ The maddened woman insisted on the impossibility of this statement: and she offered to produce witnesses to prove that her husband had inherited the land from his father, who, in his turn, had possessed it from his boyhood; asserting, that if the document said otherwise, it was an unholy lie, which carried its own condemnation.

“ Contrary to custom the court became divided in opinion; some maintained the legality of the

document, which they examined without any discovery that could tend to invalidate its testimony : others, trusting to the genuine agony of the suppliant, and remembering the grasping avarice of her opponent, refused to reject her claim : but by slow degrees, as the scorching eye of the mysterious man glanced round the circle, and seemed to search through the assembly, as if to find one hardy enough to oppose his will, each fell away in turn ; and the validity of the parchment was about to be declared, when the widow, wringing her hands in the extremity of her despair, exclaimed, with wild and startling energy—‘ Let my oppressor swear to the truth of what he has advanced ! If he can raise his strong right hand to heaven, and vow that he has spoken like a true man, the field is his ; and I will look for succour in another world——’

“ Slowly, but firmly, rose the man of mystery and fear, and with a heavy step he strode to the foot of the table, opened the code of laws, and in a sepulchral voice read over the oath. When he again closed the book, he raised his hand ; but suddenly the shock as of an earthquake shook the hall ; the towers of the building rocked as though they had

been smitten with a strong blow; the glass of the casements was shivered; the wind swept like a hurricane through the long galleries; and groans and howlings, as of souls in suffering, escaped from the solid walls.

“ None stirred, for human demonstration would have been madness amid so supernatural an uproar; but when men began once more to breathe, and to look upon each other, they discovered that the guilty cause of all this terror no longer stood among them. One of the lateral windows, forced from its fastenings, betrayed the nature of his exit: the demon who had claimed his own, had borne him thence without again cumbering the quaking earth with the weight of his impious foot; and, as he passed, had perpetuated the memory of the perjury, by tracing upon the wall the likeness of his prey.

“ It is asserted that years went by; that the seasons succeeded each other; that the sun burnt upon that sketch, and the rains drove against it; but that neither time, nor weather, nor the attempts of man, could for long centuries succeed in obliterating from the façade of the town-hall of Presburg the picture of the Devil’s victim. And now that my

tale is told, what objection has our worthy host to advance against it?"

"Simply, that it is a mere fiction from beginning to end ; and that no such effigy does exist, nor, to the best of my belief, ever did exist on the noble building to which it makes allusion."

"I am well aware ;" smiled Palffy ; "that the good Presburgians are immensely jealous on this point ; and that when the Baron Medniánsky included this sketch among his collected traditions, a long and warm correspondence ensued, in which the Hungarian Antiquarian Society put forth a vast deal of learning and research to prove that as the thing does not now exist, it never could have existed ; while so far from allowing myself to be convinced of any thing so common-place, I have never conceded more than that his sable majesty made use of colours which would not stand more than a century or two ; and that, consequently, we who were born too late, have no opportunity of deciding on his efficiency in the fine arts."

Time had now glided into the small hours ; and the party broke up for the night ; the Chevalier de Bertsény, a scion of one of the noblest houses in

Hungary, having previously pledged himself to redeem his forfeit by a legend of his own ancestry on the following evening ; which he did, as soon as the circle was once more formed, by narrating the tale that follows.

THE ESCAPE.

The long and glorious reign of Leopold I. was disastrous to the crescent. After a century and a half of supremacy, it at length paled before the bravely defended walls of Vienna ; and overthrown from the rock-seated pinnacles of Buda, and thence driven, trailing upon the soil of defeat, even to its own stronghold of Stamboul, it never regained its wonted splendour ; but yielded to the glory and the greatness of the joyfully recovered cross ; and on the bloody field of Mohács, where a hundred and sixty years before, the Infidel had made at once a prey and a victim of the Christian, was he fated eventually to bite the dust ; and to abandon all further hope of bending the neck of his adversary beneath the yoke.

The long hoped-for emancipation of Hungary from Turkish thrall was concluded in the last year

of the seventeenth century : and the establishment of that peace which had become so essential to its very existence as a nation, was at length also accomplished by the frustration of the criminal and treacherous designs of Tököly, who, long leagued with the Moslem, had forgotten the interests of his country in his own ; or rather, had subjected her well-being to the furtherance of his blind and base ambition.

Louis XIV., of France, looked, however, with an envious eye on events, which, although, undeniably advantageous to the general cause of Christianity, were nevertheless calculated to give to the Emperor Leopold a position upon which he could never previously have calculated ; and thus, the wily Gaul resolved that he should not be long left in a state of peace, which would enable him to take advantage of his good fortune.

To this end, Louis designed to raise him up powerful enemies, and all his ambassadors at the courts contiguous to Vienna received their instructions accordingly.

The Marquis de Bone, then envoy to Poland, was a man at once active, impetuous, and full of

intrigue, a fit instrument for the work in hand : nor was it long ere he believed that he had found elements which required only to be brought into action by a skilful agent, to become sufficient to create a civil war throughout all Hungary.

Many of the Count Tököly's followers were still alive, who desired nothing so much as to strike another blow for national independence under George Rákotzy, who, it was well known had not forgotten that his ancestors once possessed the throne of Transylvania, and held their rank as European princes ; while he was condemned to lead a life of comparative obscurity as a private individual. Yet hitherto he had borne his reverses bravely, with perhaps occasional heart-burning when he thought upon the past, and remembered both what he might have been, and what he was ; but still without betraying any overt feeling of discontent, or making any demonstration of rebellion.

This was the proud soil on which the base Frenchman resolved to work. He talked to the heart-bowed prince of the past, until it almost seemed to live again ; he mourned with him over

the present, till the proud patriot's veins ran fire ; and he speculated with him upon the future, until a thousand vague and troublous dreams, which, but for this spirit of evil, would never have swept across the heated imagination of Rákotzy, grew into certainties, and seemed to make a duty of resistance.

True, he never advised rebellion—he was a diplomatist ; and these men of guile never advise ; enough for them to infer, deduce, and rarely, very rarely, to suggest. But all that wily gibes, and crude insinuations, and crafty questions, and implied regrets could do, was done ; until the misguided prince, who believed that De Bone had met him in a spirit as frank and as honest as his own, became a mere tool in the hands of a worthless politician ; while he thought himself a patriot, and prepared himself to become a victim.

Dazzled by the specious reasonings of the Frenchman ; wounded by his sarcasms, affectedly veiled as they were ; and misled by his own ambition, as well as by the natural bravery of his disposition—which made every adventure in which glory might be won, and danger was to be dared, a temptation almost beyond resistance—Rákotzy at length madly

headed the last and most fatal rebellion, in which Hungary rose against her alien-emperor, ere she consented to consider herself as a subject-kingdom to Austria, even in name.

Immediately declared Generalissimo of the Army of Liberation, the rebel prince soon found himself at the head of a large and efficient force; and surrounded by men of authority, birth, and military experience, who at once gave strength and importance to the perilous cause to which they vowed themselves.

Among these, one of the most powerful was Count Nicholas Bertsény, a wealthy noble, connected with Rákotzy both by blood and in affection. Expert and brave in the field, and singularly calm and dispassionate in the council-chamber, Bertsény was appointed second in command; but his error was a too blind confidence in his good fortune, which had been such through life that the fact of his joining the insurgents appeared to them as an omen of success. This reliance on his star, tended to make Bertsény less cautious than was either wise or expedient; and occasionally induced him to neglect those prudential measures which are so

necessary to the happy issue of every hazardous adventure, that no justification can be offered for their being overlooked; nor did it seldom occur that he paid dearly both in purse and person for his imprudence.

But his personal courage and intrepidity were so great, that his immediate followers seldom suffered defeat, and they consequently adored him; while the bold adventures to which he led them on, produced such profitable fruit that they were enabled, without murmuring, to share occasionally in some of his reverses. Indeed, had all the rebel generals followed the example of Bertsény, instead of indulging in the idle dissensions and jealousies, which even the watchful eye and prudent moderation of Rákotzy was at times unable to prevent, it is probable that Austria would have found it much more difficult to appease the storm which then threatened her.

At length the decisive battle of Romhány was fought, in which Rákotzy's army was not only conquered, but entirely dispersed. They had fought well and bravely, but had been worn out at last by hardship, fatigue, and hopelessness. All

was over : it was idle even for the most sanguine spirit to suggest the expediency of further resistance ; and the discomfited nobles who had led the troops, met in a mountain-ravine to arrange their future place of refuge.

Compelled for the present to disperse, Poland was hurriedly resolved upon as their point of reunion ; and then taking such a farewell of each other as men must take with rebel weapons in their hands, and a lost cause at their hearts, they separated each to his home, to secure such of their property as they could bear about them in their retreat ; and to put hasty and partial order to those affairs which must be abandoned to others.

Arrived without accident or hindrance at his estate at Temetvény, Bertsény hastened to lay hands on all his portable property, that it might accompany him in his flight ; and having done this, determined to risk a last visit to his castle of Brunotz, situated at the foot of a mountain on the banks of the Wáag, which in time of peace had been his favourite residence ; and he was the more inclined to tempt the adventure, as he had ascer-

tained from his followers that no Austrian troops had yet been seen in the valley.

His resolution once formed, the Count instantly put it into practice ; and springing to the saddle, he galloped from the court-yard of Temetvénny, followed by half-a-dozen of his retainers, and again found himself at Brunotz. Then Bertsény looked around him, and for the first time his brave heart sank. He was surrounded by objects that he had loved from his youth up : the glancing river, the solemn mountains, the shadowy forests, the grassy meads—all the sights and sounds of his fair home ; and who should say how long he might look upon them in peace !

As he stood lost in a reverie, in which the sweet and bitter were strangely blended, an armed retainer entered the hall, and placed a paper in his hand. It was rudely folded, and as rudely written ; but the unfortunate Count at once deciphered its import. It contained only a few words, yet they were fraught with fate :—“ The Count Bertsény must fly on the instant, if he would save his life,” thus ran the missive :—“ This very evening a division of German troops will invade his domain,

with orders to take him dead or alive. All the roads are occupied ; he can escape only through the mountains."

The attainted noble gave one more hurried glance from the casement ; and then, feeling that there was not a moment to be lost, he began at once to consult with his trusty followers on the best means of baffling his pursuers. If the lower roads were watched, he too well knew that it would be impossible to force a passage ; and he could not doubt the information of the unknown friend by whom he had been warned, which be he whom he might, after the essential service which he had already rendered to him and his ; and thus he saw that if he would indeed save his life, he must trust himself to the steep and toilsome mountain passes, along which neither horse nor carriage could make its way ; and to paths known only to hunters and shepherds, and intersecting each other in every direction.

The fatigue of such an undertaking, even setting aside the danger, was enough to deter as bold a spirit as that of the fugitive Count ; who being a robust man, and totally unaccustomed to travel on foot, might well shrink from the task ; and when,

superadded to these considerations, was remembered the severe and still unhealed wound which he had so recently received at Romhány, the stoutest of his followers began to murmur their conviction that he had better stay and brave his fate at Brunotz, for that he never would reach Poland alive, through the inhospitable region which had been pointed out.

“ No, no !” at length exclaimed Bertsény, rousing himself from his temporary fit of indecision : “ Seek not to dissuade me ; I must incur the risk ; I can but die. Here I might die also ; but who shall say that some unlucky chance might not betray me alive into the hands of my enemies, to hear myself stigmatized as a rebel, and to feel myself perish by the death of a traitor ! Or, say that I fell here—here, on my own hearthstone—at beautiful Brunotz that I have loved so well—who shall tell me that they will not defile my poor remains with violence ? No, no ; let me die the death of a free man, with my foot on the mountain side, my eye on the blue heaven, and my weapon in my hand. The question is not, *if I go*, but *how ?* ”

“ And *when*, my lord, not less ;” broke in a

French swordsman, whose life Bertsény had saved in battle, and who had since been attached to his person ; “ while it is certain that something must be done to baffle your pursuers, or you will scarcely escape by what road soever you may travel ; for even the time that we have spent in this discussion, brief as it has been, has helped our enemies upon their way.”

“ He is right ;” said Bertsény ; “ but how to effect this ? ”

“ My gracious master ;” replied the Frenchman, “ hasten back to Temetvény ; put the fortress into as perfect a state of defence as may be possible in this emergency, and leave the rest to your devoted followers.” And having so said, he whispered a few hurried words in the ear of the Count, and ere many more minutes had elapsed, Bertsény and a couple of his retainers were in the saddle, and breasting the mountain towards the stronghold which he had so lately quitted.

Little more passed between the noble and his followers, save that one stalwart swordsman, his foster-brother, who greatly resembled him, seized his hand and kissed it, as he was superintending

the pointing of a gun upon the rampart which commanded the approach to the castle; and that Bertsény, withdrawing his fingers, drew the man to his heart, and tenderly embraced him, as he whispered “ How shall I repay you this noble affection ?”

“ By remembering me when you are beyond their power ; ” was the murmured reply : and so they parted, for the retainer turned suddenly away, and disappeared round an angle of the building. Bertsény would have expostulated, but the opportunity for so doing was denied to him, as his devoted follower appeared no more.

Twilight had no sooner gathered upon the earth, than the Count, in the garb of a common swordsman, and attended only by one faithful vassal, to whom the mountain paths were well known, quitted the castle without the cognizance of the garrison ; while his foster-brother, with whom he had parted upon the ramparts, and who had volunteered to sacrifice himself for his lord, remained to personate him.

As the letter had announced, so it fell out : during the night a strong division of the imperial

troops marched upon Brunotz, surrounded the castle, and peremptorily demanded admittance; having previously secured every outlet by which it was possible for Bertsény to escape.

After a brief parley the gates were opened, and the commander, with a portion of the soldiery, admitted within the walls. No impediment was offered to their fruitless researches, which, however unimpeded, nevertheless necessarily occupied a considerable time, from the extent of the building, and the extreme minuteness of the scrutiny to which it was subjected. Satisfied that the Count had escaped, the leader of the party at length questioned his retainers as to where he might probably be found; when, after much pressing, the warder, with great apparent reluctance, informed him that their attainted lord had indeed been at Brunotz since the dispersion of the rebel army, but that he had departed thence in haste; and as the questions and threats of the officer were redoubled, he threw himself on his knees, and stammered out that, perhaps, a better booty might be secured in the mountain-fortress of Temetvéný.

The hint was instantly followed up; and leaving

a slight guard at Brunotz, the German officer proceeded at once with his troops to the stronghold in which he instantly felt the probability that Bertsény would shut himself up with the remnant of his followers, and hold out to the last.

As they weariedly toiled up the mountain-side, the gallant soldier studied with a quick keen eye, every appearance which might tend to betray the intentions of the Count; and as they neared the castle in the dawn, he saw enough to convince him that although the tiger had been hunted to his lair, he would sell his life dearly. Every drawbridge was up, every portcullis down, the walls were manned with armed soldiers, the embrasures bristled with guns. All hope of taking the fortress by surprise he at once saw would be idle; nor could he fail at the same time to perceive, that from its position, and the advantages which had been taken to enhance its strength by every human mean, it might almost be deemed impregnable.

Under these circumstances, conscious that he could effect nothing by open force, the officer was compelled to demand a parley; but as he was answered only by the guns of the fortress, he found

that he had no alternative save to encamp before it, and dispatch messengers to demand a reinforcement from the main army, with the intelligence that the Count Bertsény had shut himself up in Temetvény, apparently with a strong garrison, where he appeared determined to defend himself to the utmost.

Early the following morning, a strong body of military were seen approaching the fortress, and with extreme toil and difficulty, dragging their guns up the side of the steep rock ; while those already seated before the castle, commenced preparations for the siege with great energy. Scarcely, however, were the batteries erected, and a few shots fired, than the beleaguered garrison offered to capitulate ; when, after much discussion, it was agreed to suspend hostilities for the space of three days, at the termination of which period the castle was to be delivered up to the Imperial troops, should no pardon have arrived in the interval for Bertsény, nor any succour from without.

To these conditions the besiegers subscribed with great readiness, as they well knew that all hope of pardon for a chief who had played so conspicuous

and important a part in the late rebellion as the lord of Temetvén, was utterly chimerical; and they jested among themselves at the supineness of the garrison, not without casting a few gibes on the cowardice of its leader; as from the total dispersion of Rákotzy's army, they felt it to be impossible for the insurgent general to assist his friend, however greatly he might desire to do so; nor could they blind themselves to the fact, that Bertsény must have been equally aware of the circumstance; a conviction which reduced the terms of capitulation to a mere miserable and unworthy subterfuge.

At length, in the midst of their self-glory, one of the party suggested that the past career of the rebel Count had placed his courage so perfectly beyond doubt, that the probability was much greater that he only sought this delay of three days in order to effect his escape from the castle, while they were lulled into carelessness and security by the terms of the truce; and this idea was no sooner started than fifty other methods were devised for preventing the success of the stratagem; and augmented vigilance was observable throughout the camp.

Not a sound was heard which could not be

thoroughly accounted for, but the challenge of the sentinels rang on the air; not a rat changed its burrow in the rock, but it was watched lest it might prove a disguised rebel; and the very eagles as they planed over the battlements, were eyed with as much jealousy as though they had been carrier-pigeons, and the willing agents of the beleaguered garrison.

Meanwhile the besieged were by no means desirous of driving matters to an extremity, feeling themselves too weak to resist the force without, and ill provided both with provisions and ammunition: no idea of standing a regular siege ever having been contemplated by any one within the castle. Moreover, they felt that their point was gained by a delay which had secured the safety of their fugitive lord; and thus, when the three days of truce were ended, and that no succour had reached them from without, they proceeded on the following dawn to lower the drawbridge, raise the portcullis, and admit their enemies.

Haughtily and slowly did the German leader pass the threshold of the surrendered fortress; and his indignation knew no bounds, when he discovered

by how mere a handful of men it had been garrisoned ; and that, in fact, the guard who had manned the walls, had constituted the whole strength of the party. Nor was his anger and annoyance diminished, by the knowledge that, few as they were, their provisions were already nearly exhausted, and their ammunition almost spent. These were, however, minor considerations ; and setting aside his own individual mortification, he at once gave orders that the rebel general should appear, and surrender himself. His command remaining unheeded, he next directed that instant search should be made for him throughout the fortress. His instructions set forth that the attainted noble was tall, strongly built, and wore large mustachios ; and, it was added, that he would probably be found with his head swathed with linen, owing to a severe wound received in the battle of Romhány.

Ere long, an individual answering in every particular to this description, was found by a detachment sent in search of the Count, calmly reading from a huge missal, richly emblazoned, and clasped with silver ; his foot rested upon an ottoman over-

laid with tapestry-work, and he sat in a large high-backed chair of carved oak, on which his escutcheon was wrought with great skill and detail.

As the swordsmen entered, the student looked up calmly, and rising heavily from his seat like one whose wounds are new, and pulses languid, folded his furred pelisse closer across his chest, and simply saying “I am ready”—waved his hand, and prepared to follow them from the apartment. Awed by the cold haughtiness of his manner, the men did not attempt to seize him, but silently obeyed his implied command; and, ere five minutes had elapsed, he stood before the German general.

So admirably had the devoted foster-brother of the Count performed his part, and perfected his disguise, that few even of those familiar with the person of Bertsény, could at the first glance have detected the counterfeit; and it was consequently not surprising that the foreign officer, who now claimed him as his prisoner, should have been deceived.

With exulting haste, the surreptitious Count was placed in a close carriage, and under a strong guard, dispatched to Presburg; while the news of

his capture spread like wild-fire through the country, and carried a pang to many a brave heart, among those who had fought and bled beside him, and who scarcely dared to speculate upon his coming fate.

Meanwhile, Bertsény himself, attended by his faithful and zealous follower, had plunged into the intricacies of the mountain-passes, and occasionally overcome difficulties and dangers, which, to one unaccustomed like himself to this species of fatigue and peril, would have appeared altogether insurmountable ; and on the second day of their toilsome pilgrimage, the courageous presence of mind of his devoted companion preserved them from the most imminent peril. They had just accomplished the difficult pass of the Fatskoer mountain, with the intention of traversing the high road which unites the provinces of Neutra and Trentschin, when a troop of the imperial cavalry approached them at full trot, but in great disorder, singing, shouting, and jesting, at the very top of their voices. Close beside the way, rose a group of forest trees, which offered at once shelter and protection ; and the follower of Bertsény hurriedly urged his lord to avail

himself of this happy accident, and to take refuge among their boughs until the enemy should have passed by: and even as he spoke, he prepared to ensure his own safety by the same means. But the alternative, although simple and easy to the young, active, and accustomed hunter, whose boyhood's sports had habituated him to the hundred hills of his picturesque country, was totally impracticable for Bertsény, whose great bulk and less practised foot were unable to compete with the emergency; and the faithful follower no sooner ascertained the fact by an instant's anxious watching, than he hastily slid down from the branch upon which he had stationed himself, and concealing the Count in a dry ditch close at hand, he covered him thickly and carefully with the fallen leaves which lay scattered on every side; and then, clambering like a squirrel to his own place of refuge, the two pilgrims awaited in silence, and trembling, the passing of their foes.

Faint with hunger and thirst; nearly exhausted by the unwonted toil of walking whole days and nights through thick and almost impervious forests, and over the rude, stony, and uneven masses of rock, which cumbered in every direction the secret paths

that they had followed ; weakened by the agony of his unhealed and smarting wound, and suffering in every limb from the vicissitudes of the mountain climate, and the keen winds to which he was constantly exposed, as well as tortured with regrets for the past and anxieties for the future ; the fugitive noble and his follower at length, with torn garments and blistered feet, reached the higher Carpathians, bordering the county of Arver, in the valleys beyond which he hoped to find repose and security.

Here, driven by keen and resistless hunger, and anxious to rest once more under the roof of a human habitation, even although it should be for the last time, the unhappy wanderers knocked at the door of a goat-herd's hut—a miserable cabin, half rock, and half mud, thatched with fern leaves, and built under the shelving side of the mountain—to ask for bread, a draught of milk, and a night's shelter.

Evening was gathering round them, and the declining sun had scattered evanescent jewels over the foliage of the forest, and made the huge mountain glitter like a brazen monument upon its western slope ; while to the east all looked gray and

cold, for the pale moon had scarcely yet clombe the blue path of the quiet sky, to assume her silvery watch. It was the very hour for rapine and violence: no wonder then that the goat-herd and his wife, as they threw back the narrow door of their cabin, started with affright at the apparition of the two wild and ferocious-looking men who stood upon the threshold. Their coarse and tattered vestments, their dark and weather-stained faces, and, above all, the pistols and dagger which each wore in his girdle, caused the poor mountaineers to tremble as they admitted the strangers, who seemed to their terrified eyes to be stragglers from the robber-band which occasionally infested the forest.

The Count and his follower were, however, in no circumstances to canvas the feeling to which they owed the rude but ready hospitality of their hosts; and Bertsény had no sooner appeased his ravenous hunger, than he sank down upon the straw which had been prepared for his bed, and fell into a deep and heavy sleep. But his follower could not emulate his example, for the low and guarded whispers of the goat-herds, their quick and earnest glances towards the Count, and, finally, the departure of the

man himself, whom he watched as he descended into the valley, and bent his way to a small village at the base of the mountain, by the light of the clear moon, convinced him that danger was afoot.

The more he reflected, the more he became convinced that this must be the case ; and accordingly awakening his master, he hurriedly whispered his suspicions ; and Bertsény, once more stretching his aching limbs, rose from his bed of straw, and thanking their shrinking hostess for her hospitable care, without the utterance of a single word on her part to detain them, they once more set forth in the moonlight upon their painful journey.

They had already walked for several hours, and the gray dawn had yielded to the golden beams of the newly-risen sun, when, as they were skirting some stunted timber, which had preserved a dwarfed and unwholesome existence on the verge of the eternal snows that crested the mountain, a sudden and hoarse cry of “ **Halt !** ” thundered in their ears ; and instantly about a score of wild and bandit-looking men, armed to the teeth, sprang from amid the stunted brushwood, and surrounded them on all sides.

“ Halt, and Surrender !” said he who appeared to be the leader, as he presented his rifle at the breast of the Count, while another of the party made the same hostile demonstrations towards his follower ; “ Resistance is useless : You are our prisoners !”

“ When we are taken ;” replied Bertsény, calmly, as he drew a pistol from his belt, and prepared to defend himself : “ Brave men are not conquered by words.”

At the same moment the captain of the band, leaning towards him, and looking earnestly in his face, exclaimed in an accent of astonishment ; “ Can it be possible, or do my eyes deceive me ? My lord of Temetvény, is it indeed you who stand before me in this peasant-garb ?”

“ Be you whom you may, I answer ‘ Yes ; ’ ” said Bertsény calmly : “ but you shall never take me alive.”

“ My own beloved general !” murmured the robber, as he placed his rifle in the hand of one of his men, and threw himself at the feet of the Count : “ We have mourned your imprisonment, which is the tale of the whole country ; while (St. Stephen and St. George be praised !), you stand here a free

man, surrounded by bold hearts, which will shed their best blood to protect you. Here are we all, my lord, fugitives from the brave army that would have freed our country ; outcasts, fugitives, like yourself, and here we swear henceforward to do your bidding, be it what it may."

And as the leader of the band ceased speaking, and looked up into the face of the Count, as if to read there his answer, it was a strange scene to look upon that company of outlaws and robbers, as they one and all bent the knee beside their chief, and echoed back—"We swear!"

Bertsény was for a moment overcome, but he soon rallied, as giving his hand to the captain, he bade them rise, in a voice which still quivered with emotion ; and when they had obeyed, he anxiously asked how it could have chanced, that brave men, who had once vowed themselves to the salvation of their country, could thus have degenerated into brigands, preying upon her very vitals, and destroying her good name.

He was answered respectfully, but firmly, that they had been true to the sacred cause they had sworn to uphold, even to the last fatal field of Rom-

hány ; and that after their defeat and dispersion, they had wandered among the forests and the mountains, sustaining life by roots and berries, and the game that they were enabled to destroy without having recourse to their fire-arms, which might have betrayed them ; but that at length, driven to desperation by their necessities, and rendered formidable by the constant accession of comrades similarly circumstanced, they had resolved to revenge their miseries upon such as might fall in their way ; and this, their first attempt at outrage, had brought them into the presence of their old general.

After a few reproaches and entreaties ; satisfied from his own sufferings that theirs was rather a crime of necessity than inclination, Bertsény in his turn gave them an outline of his misfortunes and trials, and expatiated upon the fidelity of the brave retainer by whom he was accompanied, and the devotion of his gallant foster-brother ; and then, raised upon the arms of two of the stoutest of the party, the exhausted noble was borne to the cavern which had been appropriated as the head-quarters of the band ; where a soft couch was prepared of cloaks, spread thickly over a mass of sweet-scented

heather; and when they had carefully laid him down, and dressed his wound with all the rude skill acquired in the camp, they supplied him with food, and bade him rest in peace, as they would watch beside his cavern-bed, even more warily than they had ever done before his tent; and Bertsény, deeply affected by their attachment, complied without one misgiving, and slept as soundly on his rude pallet, surrounded by his robber guard, as he had ever done at his favourite Brunotz, encompassed with state, and canopied with velvet.

On the morrow, in the presence of the Count, the captain of the bandits released every man from his oath of allegiance as a free-woodsman; and when his strength was perfectly recruited, the attainted noble, with his singular body-guard, made his way without further accident into Poland; where he lingered for awhile, in the fond hope that some circumstance might occur, which would enable him to return to his own land: but when at length this cherished anticipation gradually faded away, he passed over to France, where he ultimately died; but not before he had been rejoined by his devoted foster-brother, who, after years of imprisonment,

was finally liberated; and who profited by his first moment of liberty, to fly to the feet of his beloved master, and to solace the remaining years of his exile by the care and tenderness of a long-loved and long-lost friend and vassal.

CHAPTER VII.

“AND now,” said the Baron Andrew Treplitz, when Bertsény had told his tale; “I am fairly caught in my own toils, for I find that I am the next victim; and as such is the case, I will e’en give you another legend connected with the defeat of the unfortunate Rakótzy; but mine shall be a tradition of the reckless free-woodsmen in their earlier days, ere the chivalrous Sobri made the trade so popular. Those of my auditors who look upon George Rakótzy as a mere rebel, must bear with me if I reverence his memory, as that of a patriot chieftain. That his ambition was inordinate, I am ready to admit; but it was so nobly exhibited, and so consistently nourished, that it is impossible to withhold one’s admiration from the man, however much one may condemn the politician; nor is it less certain that he has lost no inconsiderable portion of the sympathy of posterity, from the fact of having been frequently confounded with his less distinguished and less interesting kinsman.”

"He at least taught his countrymen an useful lesson," remarked the host.

"And he taught it nobly!" pursued Treplitz; "at the sacrifice of position, fortune, and domestic peace. He suffered neither defeat, nor disgrace, nor danger to deter him, while one hope was left; and when he expired in exile and in poverty, the only pang of his death-bed was the agony of feeling that he died far from home—from the country for which he had lost all; and for which he would willingly have laid down his life."

"He was the tool of France—" observed M. D'Eödenffy.

"And the puppet of the Turks—" followed up the host.

"That his enthusiasm may have rendered him the prey of one, or both;" said Treplitz with energy; "I am willing to admit: but he was a brave man, and lavished all that he possessed upon his cause."

"He must have had glorious moments!" broke in the pale student, to the surprise of the whole party; "Think what it must have been when he bivouacked his army in the clefts and caverns of our magnificent Carpathians, with an Emperor in arms

against him, and nothing between a crown and a scaffold but the decree of chance! It makes the heart bound to think of such a waking—the dim mysterious vapours floating between him and the blue heaven above his head, and wreathing themselves into a thousand fantastic shapes about his feet, shrouding from his view the land for which he was about to dare his fate! And how grand at such a dawning, to call up his hordes, as it must have seemed from chaos, and to behold them starting forth amid the dim vapours, looking in the refracted light like an army of giants! I wonder—” and the melancholy youth swept his hand across his brow, as if to still the beating of his own pulses; “I wonder that he preserved his senses.”

“Rakótzy was no imaginative character;” smiled the host in reply to this unexpected outbreak; “you have only to study his career to see at once that he did not rush into the difficulties which eventually overcame him, without having, at least as he imagined, previously calculated the chances. That he was a brave, as well as a bold man, even his enemies must concede; but let us hope that he will

long continue to be known as our last revolutionary leader ; for this it is which invests him with an enduring interest ; and for our country's sake, I trust that it is one of which he will never be deprived during my life."

"He had all the chivalry of Hungary collected beneath his banner :" said Palfy ; "this at least, and the devotion with which they clung to him until he himself emancipated them by his flight, must have consoled him amid all his reverses."

"But what could suffice to console his high-hearted wife ?" asked the low sad voice of the lady of Revay ; "She who even in the earliest years of her marriage, found that she had only won a divided heart, and that her lord had other hopes and other ambitions than those which her love might have taught her to satisfy—who saw her son morally an orphan from the hour of his birth—and who lived to know him in whom she had garnered up her soul, pining in exile, abandoned by his friends, and branded as a felon ? Rakótzy, doubtless, suffered much, but he volunteered his fate ; and was strengthened amid his reverses by the applause of hundreds ; while she whom he had won to share his fortunes,

was left to weep alone—forgotten and unpitied—left to feel that she was helpless, either to aid or to avenge. Rakótzy was a hero, and the world has its plaudits and its sympathy for heroes in their defeat; but his wife was a martyr, and so much the mightier victim, that the crowd have nothing in common with home-sorrow; and although her heart might have wept blood, would not have spent a thought upon her woman-sorrow."

" Nay, if even my gentle cousin see cause to rebuke our unreflecting comments on the misguided prince ;" said the host : " we have prolonged the theme too long, or treated it too idly. Moreover, Treplitz has warned us that he is about to speak of Rakótzy in his narrative, and he has a right to be heard."

" The necessity of so doing will be forced upon me ;" said the young Baron ; " in order to make my tale intelligible ; for it is one of those historical episodes which owes its interest rather to association than to aught else. The story was told to me on the very spot where its main incident was stated to have occurred : and if I do not insist on an implicit belief of all its details, I shall at least

have the gratifying consciousness that I am far more liberal to my hearers than the sturdy peasant who served as my own chronicler was disposed to be towards myself; for, although I neither saw the miracle, nor the results of it, he would fain have had me pledge my nobility on my perfect faith in its operation; while I, on the other hand, leave to you one and all, my fair and noble friends, the full freedom of volition."

THE MIRACULOUS CROSS.

The civil war which raged in Hungary at the commencement of the last century, was the most fierce and enduring in its effects in the hilly provinces; and finally condensed all its baneful fury in the neighbourhood of Presburg, to whose vicinity the imperial troops had retired.

The battle of Tyrnau, and subsequently that of Trenschin, gloriously won by Heister over the army of Rakótsy, forced the latter to vacate the district of the Danube and Wáag, and to carry on his harassing, but hopeless system of warfare in the higher Carpathians on the frontier of Poland; his resources being nearly exhausted, and his troops

greatly reduced in number, although still full of courage and enthusiasm.

The hardy mountaineers who formed the principal portion of his army, were men inured to every species of hardship and privation ; and thus, as they were driven from one stronghold to another, they made their temporary home among the rifts and caverns of the mountain ranges without a murmur ; or any want of faith in the heroic, but misjudging, prince who led them on.

When they were compelled to vacate the ancient city and suburbs of Tyrnau, they at once betook themselves to the mountains, by which the plain beyond the town is almost entirely encircled ; and there, climbing like chamois to the rugged and dangerous summits of the chain, these children of the mist contentedly awaited the will and pleasure of their chieftain.

In person, Rakótzy was the very *beau ideal* of a patriot-chief ; and his sword and battle-axe, which are still preserved in the National Museum at Pesth, are sufficient evidence of his great muscular power. He was married to a lovely woman of high blood ; and was the father of a son who gave

goodly promise that he would do no disgrace to his illustrious line ; but domestic happiness did not possess a sufficient charm for the bold, ambitious, and warlike nature of Rakótsy, to still within his breast the ceaseless yearning for independence, and, as his enemies assert, for sovereignty ; and thus, he dreamt wild and impossible dreams of freeing Hungary from the Austrian yoke, and restoring her to her previous position of an independent nation, governed by her own king : and thus, also, although possessed of wealth, honour, and a proud name ; with every thing to lose, both for himself and his young son, galled by the stranger-rule which had fallen upon the land, uncalculatingly, and recklessly, did he vow to shake it off, or perish ; and he performed his vow only too well ; for, after years of resistance and bitterness, he was made a prisoner, and his bold heart burst in the exile to which he was condemned.

Brave even to desperation as a general, the Prince Rakótsy was mild and courteous in private life ; and his great and remarkable personal beauty no doubt tended in a considerable degree to maintain his hold over his enthusiastic followers. The

wild mysterious life which they were compelled to live, must also have had its charm to a romantic and chivalrous people like the Magyars: and the bold daring with which they swept downward from their mountain-eyrie only to carry death before them; and to struggle foot by foot for the possession of the soil, which they felt to be their own, and which they considered as polluted by the rule of an alien monarch, consecrated their rebellion in their eyes, and made it virtue.

Pity it is that heroes and rebels should be made of the same brave materials !

After their retreat from Tyrnau, and a brief period of repose among their mountain-fastnesses, the army of Rakótsy invested Trenschin; to the possession of whose rock-seated citadel they attached such immense importance, that for the space of five years they besieged it at frequent intervals, although they sustained great loss on every occasion; and at one period they had strong hope of success, having so reduced the resources of the garrison, that they were compelled to exist on dogs, cats, and vermin, in order to sustain nature; when, fortunately for the famishing soldiery who had

done their duty boldly, and had sworn to hold the castle until they perished by famine behind their own ramparts, they were relieved by Heister, who raised the siege, and removed the seat of war to Sárossa; where he so harassed and reduced the forces of the rebel prince, that he was ultimately conquered, taken, and what to him was more bitter than a thousand deaths, exiled from that land for which he had sacrificed every thing on earth.

The insurgents made captive, or dispersed, peace resumed her sway over the land: and the peasant returned in security to his hitherto dangerous avocations. Where blood had been spilt, the yellow corn obliterated the sanguine stain; and the labourer, rousing himself from inactivity to exertion, soon became surrounded by monuments of his own industry. But, perhaps, the most important result of recovered tranquillity was the resumption of trade with the neighbouring nation of Moravia, which, to the great disadvantage of both countries, had been altogether suspended during the intestinal disturbances in Hungary; the chief line of communication and traffic being across the

White Mountains, which were the principal scene of warfare, and alternately in the possession of one or other of the contending parties.

The cessation of hostilities having opened this important line of road, it was soon covered with parties of merchants, anxious to dispose of their long-hoarded goods, at the great *rendezvous* of commerce, Tyrnau; but this very circumstance also drew thither a strong band of robbers, for whom the nature of the country afforded but too many and efficient means of securing both themselves and their booty; and, ere long, they infested the whole range of the White Mountains, under the command of their active and terrible captain, Rajnoka. This man, of whose activity, subtlety, and gigantic strength, many a fearful tradition is yet extant in the country, had been a corporal of horse under Rakótzy, and after the dispersion of the rebel army, had fled to the mountain fastnesses, where he had wandered a fugitive and an outlaw.

From time to time, Rajnoka encountered some of his old comrades, whom a common fate had driven to the same shelter; and as their numbers increased, instead of shrinking from pursuit and

discovery, they became daring ; and having organized themselves into a regular body, they unanimously elected Rajnoka as their leader ; and, together with him, took an oath of enmity to the whole human race.

Disappointed in their hopes, blighted in their ambition, hunted like wild animals into the recesses of their own mountains, and cut off from all commerce with their kind, the exasperated rebels felt no compunction in becoming robbers ; and having secured a chief, whose reckless bravery and bold treachery are still the theme of story and of song, they soon became, and continued to be for several years, the terror of all that part of the country.

Most of the inhabitants of both hill and plain knew Rajnoka by sight ; yet no one dared to inform against him, or attempt his capture, for they justly dreaded the vengeance of the band, who were devoted to him ; and thus the bold robber not only met them on the mountain side, and amid the *pusztas*, but elbowed them in the crowded streets of their cities, and cheapened the merchandise in their markets.

It chanced that on one occasion a numerous

caravan of Moravian merchants were on their way to the annual fair at Tyrnau, whence the spies of Rajnoka were informed they would return with well-filled purses, as their goods must meet a rapid and advantageous sale. The news were pleasant, but the robber determined to convince himself that such was really the case ; and, accordingly, assuming the gay-looking peasant-garb of the district, with his rifle in his hand, and half-a-dozen of his followers within hail, he made his way to the city.

When he arrived, the vast square, or place, was cumbered with the wooden booths of the traders ; and it required an effort to make way among the crowd, who were standing gazing at the bright coloured stuffs which were flung upon them, or piled up on either side the entrance ; the arms, and implements of industry, the feathered *kalpags*, coarse felt hats, and other merchandize ; while, above their heads, towered the lofty and handsome plague-column which occupies the centre of the space ; and whose steps were for the moment converted into graduated shops, where meerschaums, and other small articles of traffic were on sale ;

and in the distance, the metal-covered towers of the ancient cathedral glittered in the sun-light.

From the narrow and rudely-paved streets groups of people were every moment forcing their way into the square; while on the summit of the watch-tower which surmounted the city gate, sat a party of men calmly smoking their pipes, and gazing down from their tranquil eminence, upon the coil and strife below.

But Rajnoka looked neither upon the oriental-seeming domed towers of the venerable Domkirche, nor up to the platform of the watch-tower; though among those who sat there was one who knew the robber well, and who pointed him out to his companions as he elbowed his way through the crowd, turning from his path the most worshipful magistrates of the city, and the wealthiest merchants of the square; while his braided pelisse hung jauntily across his shoulders, and the eagle feather in his large felt hat was fastened with a bunch of artificial flowers, of the gaudiest hues, and most elaborate proportions. His search was neither for the picturesque nor the sentimental; and, as he threaded his way up one avenue of the market, and

down the other, until he had traversed every alley of booths, his keen glance was taking note of the description, quality, and quantity of the merchandise ; and his quick thought estimating its probable value.

Either sated or wearied by the survey, the wily robber made a few trifling purchases ; chaffered for a score of kreutzers, as though they formed all his worldly possessions ; drank a draught of sour wine from the barrel of an itinerant vintner ; and then leisurely re-passed the gate, and made his way back to the head-quarters of the band.

On the summit of the mountain of Barwinck is a vast forest, which, after cresting the height with foliage, spreads far down the sides of the declivity ; and its ancient oaks of enormous bulk, are mingled with the tall straight pine, the heavily-leaved elm, and the feathery chesnut. Through the heart of this dim and far-reaching forest a primitive road had been formed, by clearing away the dense underwood, and burning down the timber, to facilitate the passage of merchandise from Moravia ; and it was, consequently, by this rude and difficult road that the merchants then trading at Tyrnau were to return homeward.

The spot was one well suited to violence and rapine ; and Rajnoka immediately decided that here the money-laden merchants should deliver up their gains to him and to his band ; while the point once resolved, the robbers formed their rude bivouac, and forbore again to enter the city, until they should have completed their purpose ; and thus, although some of the most wary traders shook their heads doubtfully, and muttered that it would be well to keep together, and to be cautious while they were upon the road ; the majority of the party, flushed with success, and satisfied that none of the band had been seen for several days in the neighbourhood, but that, on the contrary, rumours were abroad of depredations near Presburg, felt satisfied that there was nothing to fear ; and remembering their own number, cheated themselves into the belief that the robbers would not care to encounter so formidable a force.

At Barwinck, however, they were fearfully undeceived ; for, although they reached the heart of the forest at mid-day, they were furiously set upon by the brigands, commanded by their formidable chief in person ; and after a desperate resistance, in

which one of their body was killed, they finally surrendered to their ferocious assailants.

The murdered man was one of the wealthiest and most important of the party, and he fell at the foot of a stately oak, about whose trunk the tempests of a century had howled innoxious ; and whose stately and far-stretching branches, as they spread wide beneath the sky, seemed to form a mimic forest.

When the conflict was at an end, the saddle-bags, valises, and pockets of the merchants were strictly searched ; and, satisfied with their booty, the band ultimately dispersed, leaving their victims to tend their own wounded, and to bear away their own dead.

A few months afterwards the bereaved family of the murdered merchant caused a leaden crucifix to be affixed to the bole of the venerable oak, to which was attached a figure of the Saviour, and an exhortation to the passing traveller to pray for the soul of the departed ; and this pious act seemed to have freed the forest from the presence of the robber-band ; for even those of the neighbourhood who professed to know the greater number of the culprits by sight, were unable to declare that they had

seen one of them since the encounter of Barwinck ; and they consequently inferred that the hot pursuit which had been made after them by the military, and the discovery of several of their favourite haunts, had determined them to quit the province : but the fact was otherwise. For a time Rajnoka and his followers, enriched by the heavy booty that they had taken from the merchants on that memorable occasion, had abandoned themselves to ease and debauch ; and had scattered themselves in small bands through Transylvania and Poland, in search of amusement ; until the anniversary of the fair of Tyrnau, on which the chief had resolved to repeat the exploit of the preceding year.

When they met again, Rajnoka informed them that he had carefully trodden the road from the gates of Tyrnau to the Moravian frontier, but had failed to find a more fitting spot for their intended ambuscade than that which had served them so well on the former occasion ; and that he had, therefore, resolved once more to make it the point of attack.

While the band were forming their wild and hurried bivouac, one of the younger robbers, who

had only recently enrolled himself among them, and who had not fully served his apprenticeship to their foul trade, for he had never yet shed blood, suggested that it would be better to move a little onward, where a bend in the road would prevent their committing the contemplated outrage under the very eyes of the figure on the cross, which he declared already seemed to look with threatening upon their design.

With a fierce and bitter laugh of derision, Rajnoka jeered him on what he termed his weak and boyish superstition ; and refused to march the troop one foot further into the forest, in order to humour the idle terror of an idiot, who could suffer a piece of painted lead to freeze the marrow in his bones ; and make one who had the stature of a man, and who had sworn to approve himself worthy of the fellowship of the free-woodsmen, quake like a chidden child !

“ I do not quake !” exclaimed the youth, ashamed to be thus twitted before his comrades : “ I am no coward !”

“ You are worse ;” said Rajnoka, with a sneer : “ you are a woman.”

"Prove me, and you shall see that you do not know me ;" was the reply of the young man.

"Be it so ;" said the chief; while the band gathered round, anxious to amuse their idleness by the result of the stormy dialogue : " You shall be proved this very instant ; and that by a task which any child would find easy that could lift its arm so high. Go, strike me off the head which has made a trembler of you, from its painted trunk, that so all boys who shall henceforward pass this way may do it without fear."

The young robber gazed into the face of his terrible leader, as if to learn that he had indeed heard aright, and that his tingling ears had not deceived him ; but although the cold fierce sneer of the stern lip, and the glare of the stony eye, at once convinced him that the sacrilegious words had really been uttered, he did not stir a limb : for even at that moment, as they stood foot to foot, and brow to brow, under the dense forest boughs, a sweet vision of his cottage-home rose up before him ; and he was kneeling at his mother's knee, clasping the crucifix which was appended to her rosary, and murmuring at her dictation, and responsive to her low soft voice,

a prayer, which once more, after a long, long interval, quivered upon his lip.

And that prayer brought with it other memories—and he saw again the green meadow traversed by a rapid brook whose pigmy waves brawled and battled with every pebble in its shallow bed ; and the tree beneath which he had lain upon his back, with his brow bared to the breeze of heaven, and his eye busied in tracing the threads of sunshine as they wove their golden tapestry on the rich leaves and slender branches. But all this passed across his brain like the flight of an arrow, or the passage of an eagle ; and then his spirit quailed within him, for they were the ghosts of his days of innocence ; and with a deep quick sigh, he glanced round upon his blood-stained associates, and sought to lay them forever.

“ Coward ! idiot ! *woman !* ” shouted the robber-chief, after the pause of a moment : “ You will infect your comrades with your own empty and dastard terror, and we shall lose our booty, because a fool turns craven at sight of a dumb image ! ” And even as he spoke, he raised his giant arm, and with a huge axe which he constantly carried in his girdle,

he attempted to cleave the figure as he had directed should be done by his young follower.

But even as the blow would have descended, the trunk of the huge tree flew open to the centre, and received the crucifix ; while the tall boughs swept heavily downward for a moment, and then rebounded, only to discover to the terrified robbers that the holy effigy had disappeared : and when the branches had regained their original form and height, they began to toss wildly to and fro as a hurricane swept over them, and howled and roared, until the whole forest became one frightful voice of discord and tumult ; while hoarse thunders rattled from height to height, along the mountain chain ; and fierce and forked lightnings ran shimmering across the heavens, and striking against the jagged peaks of the rocks, toppled down huge fragments into the plain beneath, which bursting as they fell, added to the wild uproar.

And then—in that frightful moment—when gigantic trees which had seemed to scorn the elements, were laid prostrate in their leafy pride, like a strong man smitten in his prime—when even the rocks were rent, and the clouds seemed to vomit forth fire—those men of crime were scattered, and

fled they knew not whither, in search of a place of refuge. No two were left together; for some powerful, though invisible hand, seemed to drive them on, and to shut their hearts to all save their own terrors.

When the storm subsided, the young robber who had shrunk from the impious task proposed to him, awoke from what seemed to have been a deep trance, on the bank of the beautiful and tranquil river Wáag, where it traverses a richly-wooded nook of the fair valley from which it takes its name. For a time he lay there, under the warm sunshine, in a species of lethargy, hoping nothing, remembering nothing; but slowly following with his eyes the lazy progress of the timber-rafts, which were floating down with the current; and feeling, rather than hearing, the shrill wild song of the women who were cleansing their linen, knee-deep in the stream. But gradually memory grew keener, and he trembled as the vision of the forest-fastness came back upon him: then he shuddered, and a chill crept through his veins, as the wild havoc and uproar of the storm sounded again in his ears; and in the agony of his spirit he writhed amid the long

grass, and turning upon his back, closed his eyes, and—again, after an interval of months of sin,—he prayed.

That deep and earnest orison calmed down his quivering pulses ; and after a time he raised his heavy eyelids,—Did he not dream ? He looked upon the green boughs of his boyhood, dancing in the light, and gay with the golden threads of the busy sunshine. The air was rich with scents, too—the pure fresh scents of nature ; the perfume of the quivering leaf, and the wild flower, and the young grass : and the youth wept tears of quiet gratitude as he lay there beneath the light, and thought of his cottage-home, and his fond mother, and the grey-haired father whose example he had slighted, whose advice he had scorned, but to whose arms and heart he would now return a penitent : and as he framed the vow, he raised himself upon his elbow, and looked round ; and with an astonishment mingled with fear, he recognised the valley in which he had been born ; the river upon whose banks he had sported in his boyhood ; the wood in whose green depths he had hunted down the leveret and the young kid ; and the plain where he had watched the

herd of horses entrusted to his care ; and even as he remembered these, he heard the tramping of many feet, and a drove of half-wild animals galloped past him, and waded into the stream to drink ; and when he rose to avoid them, his eye fell on a grey and bent old man, who followed slowly where they led, with a feeble and uncertain step ; and the youth bounded forward, and with a loud cry of recognition, flung himself upon his father's neck —.

The oak wherein the Miraculous Cross was enclosed, is still held sacred ; and is a place of prayer for every traveller who traverses the mountain-forest of Barwinck. And it deserves to be so ; for never since the disappearance of the crucifix, and the consequent dispersion of the robber-band, has any freebooter ventured to pursue his unholy avocation in its hallowed vicinity.

CHAPTER VIII.

“FOR my part;” exclaimed the Count Palfy, as the sudden silence proclaimed the termination of the legend; “I think the story an admirable one; and am resolved implicitly to believe every sentence of it, even to the fact of the young robber going to sleep in one part of the country, and awaking in another. In short, I consider it as a very pretty and pathetic version of the prodigal son. My friend Treplitz has acquitted himself very respectably; and his tale only required a dash of love in it to make it all that I could have wished.”

“It must be confessed;” acquiesced the host; “that hitherto our party have been somewhat ungallant, for the fairer part of the creation have occupied a very insignificant proportion of the traditional canvass. I am an old man, and consequently perhaps the least constituted among you to do them even this tardy justice; but nevertheless, I will volunteer in my turn a narration, in which there

shall be at least some glimpses of a better spirit ; and my lovely listeners will, I feel assured, give me credit for my old-fashioned chivalry, although they may be unable to applaud its results."

The proposal was received with hearty acknowledgments ; and the noble-looking old man, having established himself near his kinswoman's work-frame, with his nephew on his other hand ; proceeded forthwith to fulfil his promise.

THE WETTERLING.

The main road which leads from the county of Presburg into that of Neutra, and from thence into Moravia, winds in beautiful curvatures through the valley, here and there disappearing among tall trees extending for several hundred yards, and then again sweeping along the midst of corn-tracks as it circles the base of the Wetterling mountain, ere it finally vanishes in the green depths of the extensive forest which carpets its foot, and creeps gaily up a portion of the ascent.

Ere attempting the steep acclivity, however, the traveller arrives at an opening which, through a gorge of the mountain, gives egress to a green and

glittering valley, watered by a clear and bounding stream, to whose limpid waters the dark walls of rock through which they glide afford a romantic frame-work.

During the sultry days of summer, few are the pilgrims who, on their advent to this sweet spot, after having braved the sun and dust of the highway for leagues, do not pause and bare their heated brows to the cool and refreshing stream of air which comes lovingly to them along the current of the dancing river ; but yet fewer are there who at times of storm, and in the wintry months, do not, ere they arrive upon its banks, fold their cloaks closer about them, draw their caps deeper upon their brows, and plant their feet more firmly, in order to oppose an effective resistance to the howling and furious gusts which not unfrequently drive the unprepared traveller from the path, and hurl him, panting and struggling, into the bed of the stream, or against the rude angles of the rock.

Nor is this the worst danger ; for the impetuosity of the river, and its fluctuating volume, fed by tributary torrents, rain-formed upon the mountain, having rendered it necessary to build the bridge by

which it is traversed, unusually steep and difficult ; while the paucity of traffic has induced an inconvenient economy in its construction, there is no balustrade to protect the passenger ; and instances have been known of frightful deaths produced by falls from this picturesque but dangerous bridge, into the swollen waters of the torrent, which rushes madly, hissing, and boiling, beneath its high arch, as the wild blasts of wind have swept in their fury across it.

The stranger who has never visited this mountain region, may be inclined to blame the rashness of the traveller who would brave so imminent and perilous a passage in an hour of storm ; and there would be reason in the rebuke, could he ascertain the probable state of the atmosphere, ere he trusted himself on the bridge of the pass. But such is far from being the case ; for at all times there is more or less wind perceptible at this particular spot, which naturalists and philosophers would unhesitatingly attribute to the swiftness of the river-current, the tunnel-like formation of the gorge, and such other common-places of human wisdom ; but they who are familiar with the place are not to be thus

deceived ; for they know full well that all these changes of quiet and storm, these bursts of fury and hushes of calm, depend entirely on the good pleasure and caprice of the mountain-spirit, who at his own discretion refreshes the weary traveller, and woos him onward deeper into the pass ; or repulses him sometimes even to his destruction, should he disapprove his presence, with a fury against which it is mere madness to contend.

About a mile from the mouth of the gorge, and upon the right bank of the river, rises a rock of so peculiar and ghostly an outline, that it long deceives the stranger into a belief that it is a strong, and vast, and formidable fortress, raised by the hand of man : but it is not so—keep, and tower, and battlement, and bastion ; castellated wall, and heavy buttresses ; and, yet more spectral than all these, the loftily-arched and open gateway, with its long and dim perspective of receding columns, have never yet been profaned by human footstep. Nor are they ever likely to be so ; for the peasant of the district, when his duties compel him into the neighbourhood of the Wind-Castle, ever “ passes by on the other side,” and refrains from irritating the

spirit of the spot even by a glance ; for full well he knows that it is there that the storm-demon holds his court ; and that within those walls of living rock, are cradled the infant blasts, which are nurtured into tempest, and then let loose upon the unwary passenger, when their mighty master sees fit to set them free.

Deep, deep beneath the surface of the earth are hewn, as it is believed, the spacious halls of that mysterious edifice ; and at times hollow and fitful murmurings have been heard under the feet of the trembling herdsmen of the neighbourhood, which were too indistinct to enable them to decide whether they were the pealings-out of subterranean revelry, or the practisings of the imprisoned blasts, ere they were entrusted with their death-dealing mission on the upper earth.

All is vague, and vast, and visionary about the castle, save the material of which it is composed ; and strange to say, none have pretended to believe that they ever caught a glimpse of its supernatural tenants : and yet it hath its legend ; and despite the unpromising seeming of the subject, it is one of innocence and courage, of womanly purity,

and brave self-devotion. A legend simple enough in itself, but hallowed by the bright association of womanly virtue.

Years ago—who cares how many? The chronology of our ancestors was frequently so inaccurate that we might be led into error by specifying dates—Years ago there might have been seen on the outskirts of the valley, and separated even from the little hamlet which had grown up under the sheltering shadow of the mighty Wetterling, a poor, and rude, and half-dilapidated hut; with its roof so overgrown by rank grasses, and those coarse weeds which love warmth at their roots, and scatter their worthless seeds to the summer winds, that many would have passed it by unseen, nor guessed how fair and delicate a flower it screened from the fierce sunshine.

This hovel, squalid as it looked, was, however, the abode of peace and love; and a little garden, redeemed from the plain, showed that even taste was not wanting to its inmates, be they whom they might. Unlike the cottages of the generality of Hungarian peasants, no large-leaved tobacco-plants choked up the narrow space with their rank vegetation; but

sweet-smelling herbs, and a selection of the fairest of the mountain flowers, nourished into richer blossoming by the mild air of the valley, and the careful tending of the hand by which they had been transplanted, bloomed brightly and cheerfully within the wicker fence, and peeped into the little casements.

The hut was inhabited by a widow and her child. The mother had once been the wife of the wealthiest peasant of the hamlet—one who had herds on the mountain side, rafts on the river, and corn-crops in the valley, but who had ruined himself by dissipated habits ; and who, ultimately denuded of all his possessions, sheltered himself and his uncomplaining wife in this miserable hut, which had been long abandoned by its last tenant ; and from which even after his death no one sought to expel her.

Mild, pious, and patient, the poor widow, when she had laid her unworthy husband in the grave, occupied herself entirely in securing the support of herself, and her little daughter Borsa, who was the prettiest child in the whole province ; and in whom she found an incentive to exertion, which made her

life less insupportable than it must otherwise have proved, to one whose fortunes were so utterly and irretrievably blighted.

And well was her love repaid ; for as the child grew into girlhood—lovely, and gentle, and obedient—the toil of the mother became lightened by the exertions of her little task-fellow ; and the voice of song, and the sound of laughter, made labour light in the widow's hovel, where formerly all had been anxiety and gloom.

At sixteen Borsa was as beautiful as a houri, and as happy as a bird : and she felt her poverty without repining, for it early taught her a lesson which greatly lessened the peril to which her extreme loveliness would otherwise have exposed her.

She could not be unaware, as she passed to and from the little church of the hamlet, that the eyes of all the youth of the village sought her out, and rested upon her admiringly ; while those of the maidens with whom she came in contact were averted disdainfully, that under an affectation of fancied superiority they might conceal the jealousy which her rare beauty could not fail to excite ; but at the same time she was conscious that in all the

village festivals her mother and herself were forgotten or overlooked; and when she innocently asked that mother to explain the cause of the exclusion, the poor widow taught her that it was their poverty which rendered them ineligible to join in the feasting and revelry of their neighbours; and then she told her the history of her own past life. And the honest indignation of the girl was roused within her; and she no longer felt pleasure in detecting the lingering glances of the young peasants, as at times they crossed her path; for she instinctively felt that if she were esteemed too mean to mingle in their gaieties, it could not be a worthy love with which they looked upon her; and the conviction gave her a proud feeling of the necessity of self-dependence, which effectually preserved the poor and proud child of the widow from idle impertinence.

But this state of things could not endure for ever. Human nature is not all evil. The un-tilled earth of the valley and the mountain, sometimes produces blossoms as rare and as beautiful as the cultivated soil of the parterre; and thus it chanced that Toma, the only son of the magistrate

of the village, one of the finest and worthiest youths of the little community, who had, like many others, talked lightly and idly of the beautiful girl, when he first began to remark that as she increased in stature each year added to her loveliness, watched her so long and so closely, that he ultimately became aware that she was dearer to him than all else on earth ; and that too, without one thought unworthy of himself or her. So great, indeed, was the respect with which the fatherless Borsa had inspired him, that he did not even seek to acquaint her with his passion ; but, after having convinced himself that her innocence and modesty were equal to her beauty, he at once declared to his father his intention to marry the portionless orphan.

Great was the indignation of the purse-proud *Richter*, whose ambition for his only son was unbounded ; and who had hitherto found him universally submissive to his will. He loaded him with empty threats ; called him by a thousand injurious epithets ; and swore that he would have no pennyless pauper introduced into his family by the hair-brained madness of a boy. Still the young man remained firm ; and his only reply to the violence

of his father was a declaration that if he did not marry the widow's child, he would be the husband of no woman upon earth.

Under these circumstances the exasperated *Richter* at once felt that the only method of preventing what he deemed to be so ill-omened a marriage, was to remove the innocent girl from the village. To actual force he dared not resort ; and after mature consideration, he resolved to consult a wise woman, or witch, who dwelt in a cavern of the Wetterling, and who had a great reputation among the peasantry. As the hag had never been known, however, to pander to the bad passions of those who claimed her aid, he felt it necessary to fabricate some fable which might enlist her sympathies in his cause ; for Toma was personally so popular, that he could not hope, without assigning a valid reason for opposing his wishes, to convince the wise woman of his right to do so.

He accordingly persuaded her that Borsa, anxious to secure so desirable a match, had administered a love-philtre to his son, which had so infatuated the young man's reason, as to render him utterly unable to contend against the charm.

"I could almost have deemed ;" said the witch drily, as she raked together with her crutch the dying embers of the fire which gave at once light and warmth to her gloomy abode ; " I could almost have deemed that the blue eyes of the pretty Borsa had been spell enough, without the aid of magic."

" But *my* son ;" urged the *Richter* ; " Was it probable that *my* son, the richest youth in the valley, should be the one to lose his heart to this pennyless cottage-girl, who is indebted for the very roof that covers her, wretched as it is, to the forbearance of others, had there not been means employed too powerful for him to contend against ?"

" Her father might once have been the lord of the village, if gold could in this land make power ;" resumed the old woman, in the same tone in which she had first spoken ; " Poor lamb ! she was folded by a bad shepherd."

" But is my son to be the sacrifice ?" asked the *Richter*, somewhat impatiently.

" Certainly not ; if you do not believe beauty and innocence to be a sufficient dowry," was the reply : " But what seek you of me ?"

" That you should dissolve the spell."

“The request is easy ; but how know I by whom the draught was compounded ? Leave me now : in five days you may return, and I will tell you the result of my researches.”

Ere the five days were at an end, the mother of Borsa was attacked by a dangerous malady ; and in her terror and helplessness, the unfortunate girl could think of no better expedient than that of consulting the witch, little dreaming of the treachery which had induced the weird woman to look upon her with an eye of suspicion and distrust.

She was coldly received, and her heart shrank as she remarked it ; for she had ever been courteous and respectful to the aged crone, and had even proffered little kindly offices, which, although they had been rejected, would still, she imagined, have secured to her a warmer welcome.

She told her tale, however ; to which the wise woman listened without betraying either impatience or interest ; and then, when the soft voice ceased, she rose, and in silence took a ponderous and worm-eaten volume from a shelf of rock above her head, and began to turn over its mystic pages with great apparent reverence.

As the girl sat beside her, she too fastened her eyes upon those mysterious leaves, and trembled as she gazed upon the strange and unnatural shapes that covered them. Dragons with the fair faces and graceful shoulders of early womanhood; adders and scorpions with the hands and feet of men; fishes with human eyes, and the claws of reptiles; and scattered among all these were suns, and moons, and stars, and monograms, and cyphers, and limbs severed from their trunks; and ghastly, headless, formless things, that looked as though they should have been human, and had ceased to be so only when they were traced upon that foul parchment.

The witch read on, or rather pondered in silence over those fearful pages for a long time without the utterance of a single syllable; and when at length she closed the book, she turned her cold stony eye upon the shrinking girl, and said sternly: “Your mother is lost if you do not yourself save her. No other aid can avail. The malady by which she has been led in a few suns to the dark gate through which none pass twice, can be dispelled only by the juice of a certain herb which grows on the threshold of yonder castle; and which must be gathered

at midnight by a hand which the lips of man have never yet pressed. Are you able and prepared to gather it?"

"Alas!" whispered the affrighted Borsa; "How may I dare to brave the wrath of the spirit of the winds? He will destroy me; and my poor mother will be left to die alone! Is there no other hope?"

"None;" was the cold reply: "but perchance that dainty hand has lost its power; and the touch of human passion has rendered it unmeet to save your parent?"

"Oh, no, no!" energetically exclaimed the poor girl, as she clasped her slender fingers together in a paroxysm of emotion; "Never, never, have I listened to the words of affection from any lips save those of my dying parent."

"Resolve then quickly;" was the reply; "the third night from hence it will be too late; for the moon is already at the full. Go, and pay back by your peril the life you have received."

The wretched Borsa expostulated no longer; but with a deep reverence to the witch, she left the cave, and proceeded on her melancholy way homeward.

Once, as she descended the mountain side from the cavern, she paused and looked towards the haunted castle ; lights were dancing on the river tide, where it rippled under the deep shadow of the rocky walls ; and as the girl stood, she heard the sounds of supernatural tumult rise from the earth beneath her feet. Shuddering, she hastened on, and her hand was soon upon the latch of their cottage-door.

The moonlight was streaming across the narrow floor, and fell full upon the pale face and wasted limbs of the dying woman, whose ghastly outline was defined by the scanty coverlet which veiled them. Borsa drew near to the low pallet, and bent over her suffering mother—her last and only parent—the loving one who had nursed her infancy, tended her youth, and guarded her womanhood with a fond and fervent affection, which want, and sorrow, and hopelessness, had alike failed to weaken ; and she lay there in her helplessness and agony, with no one to succour and to save her but that child, for whom she had passed a life of uncomplaining hardship and privation.

The bed of death is ever a fearful spectacle, especially to the youthful, who look for the first time

on the penalty of our common nature ; and in whose swelling veins life is bounding and gushing so merrily, that it almost seems as though it might defy the power of fate to arrest its current. Death is fearful, even when it comes to the dwelling of the wealthy and the great, where sickness hath its own pale pageant ; its train of fee'd physicians, its pillows of down, its train of menials, and its “troops of friends :” but when it clothes itself in the tatters and desolation of poverty—when it keeps its watch with the deserted, and the needy—then it is indeed seen in all its terrors : and even thus did Borsa look upon it.

The poor girl was soul-stricken ; and tottering from the bed-side of her mother to the little window of the hut, she gazed out upon the night, rich and bright with its galaxy of stars paving with diamonds the sapphire path of the full-orbed moon, whose radiance lit up the midnight world into splendour.

“ Why should I waste another hour ? ” murmured the pale maiden, as she again approached the bed : “ Why should I condemn my kind mother to live through another day of agony ? I will go now, and

dare my fate." And after pressing her lips to the damp brow of the senseless woman, whose continued existence was only perceptible from her low deep groans, she seized her cloak, and without allowing herself another moment for hesitation, rushed from the hovel.

How beautiful was the night ! The wild flowers which abounded in the valley were yielding up their incense to the wind, and filling its breath with perfume. The forest leaves were making merry music with the breeze, as if to regulate the dancing of their branches in the moonlight ; and the river was gliding along in silver, every ripple crowned with a quivering star ; but Borsa heeded not the loveliness around her, as she hurried on to bury herself under the dark shadows of the Wetterling, and plunged into the gloomy defile.

Scarcely had she done so, when the whole scene became changed ; dark and heavy drift clouds obscured the moon, and only permitted it to emerge at intervals, as if to invest every object with a pale and ghastly light, and then to render the gloom more palpable and oppressive.

As the girl hurried on, the ribbon which had con-

fined her hair burst with the labouring of her pulses, and the long golden locks streamed wildly to the blasts which began to howl about the mountain, and to rush along the current of the stream. As she pressed forward she prayed, hastily but fervently, as those only pray who feel that their time for supplication may be brief: and thus, panting, trembling, but resolute, she made her way along the river bank, until at length she stood before the high and frowning archway of the witch-castle.

As it yawned before her, she sank for a moment to the earth. Was this frightful chasm indeed to be the portal of her tomb? "And yet," she argued in her innocence; "surely I am not about to do anything evil! My purpose at least is holy; and the wise woman who sent me here, why should she seek my destruction? I have ever striven to serve and honour her, and she is human like myself, and has a human heart."

After the lapse of a few moments this reflection re-assured her, and she ventured to glance through the gloomy space. There, high above all the surrounding vegetation, she distinguished the miraculous herb of which she had come in quest, and

which was swaying to and fro in the night breeze, with a low wailing sound, which bore some resemblance to a human voice.

As she still hesitated, the clock of the little church in the valley rang the half-hour past midnight; and a hollow murmur which seemed to make the earth quiver beneath her feet, responded to the sound. With the courage of desperation, the terrified Borsa stretched out her hand, and gathered the restless herb; when instantly the yelling of a thousand fiends burst forth, and filled the air with horror. A heavy blow smote the adventurous girl to the earth; and ere she could recover from the shock, she felt herself raised high into the air, and driven to and fro by the fury of a whirlwind, amid the crashing of broken boughs, and the fall of splintered rocks. In the terror of the moment, her consciousness forsook her; and when she again awoke to life, and ventured to raise her pallid brow from the earth, she found herself lying close beside the castle, with the herb in her lap, the river rippling at her feet, and the noontide sunshine bright about her.

Bruised and exhausted as she was, she did not

linger a moment ; but securing her precious prize, with slow and painful steps she made her way to the hut ; and sinking down beside the sick-bed, pressed the witch-herb to the lips of her dying parent. Its effect was instantaneous : the suffering woman looked up and smiled upon her devoted child ; and from that hour she continued to recover, until once more health shed its blessing upon their humble home.

With health came happiness ; for the lover of Borsa, charmed with her filial heroism, soon convinced his father of the value of such a child ; while, on his side, the old man felt compunction that the very demons had shewn mercy to one whom, in his selfishness and pride of heart, he would have ruthlessly sacrificed : and thus, ere many months were passed, the orphan of the hut became the bride of the *Richter's* son ; and the widow of the profligate found herself once more beneath an honoured and happy roof.

Need it be told that the devoted and innocent daughter became a fond and blameless wife ? The good seed had been sown in healthy soil ; and the children of Toma rejoiced from their cradle to their grave in the advantages which they had de-

rived from the precepts and example of a tender and virtuous mother.

The giant Wetterling abounds in legends : nor are they only those of romance and terror ; for the ill-fated wars of Rakótzy have peopled its defiles with historical traditions. The mountain itself is considered by the peasantry as an infallible weather-glass ; and when it puts on its shroud of vapour, and buries its head in a crown of clouds, too dense for the human eye to penetrate, the herdsman collects his flocks, and the hunter abandons the chase, in the full conviction that a storm is about to burst over the valley ; while the maidens, who stand knee-deep in the stream, cleansing their household linen, give an anxious glance, from time to time, at the dark and stupendous mass and redouble their assiduity. Not unfrequently the vapours roll away, and the lofty outline of the monarch-mountain is revealed against a sky as clear and as blue as the eye of beauty ; but these falsifications of their theory and belief, diminish in no degree the absolute faith which the peasants have been accustomed to place, from their earliest years, in the infallibility of the mountain signals.

In truth it seems but just, that while its every defile and crag hath its superstition, the mighty mass itself should be held in reverence for some especial virtue; and thus the scepticism of the stranger, deceived by the assurances of the peasants into a hearty drenching in his progress along the pass, when he had been confidently promised a fine and sunshiny ramble, however it may soothe his individual mortification, produces no effect on “those to the manner born,” who steadily persist in their original confidence.

Not less celebrated than the Castle of the Wind is a huge mass of stone, rising from the turfy ground, and known as the Raven Rock; which, projecting forward for a considerable distance over the pathway, affords a complete shelter to the traveller who may chance to be storm-caught in its vicinity.

But despite the good offices which it thus renders to man in the hour of tempest, strange tales are told of the Raven Rock. The short mossy turf which it overhangs, and in which it is imbedded, is always of a sickly yellow tint, and never was the smallest wild flower known to spring up among it; and whenever the moon is on the wane, flocks of

ravens assemble about it at midnight in such multitudes, that they seem as though they had flown thither from all the ends of the earth, to hold their ill-omened orgies. Their screams ring over the valley, and it is easy for the listener to discover that there is discord among them, as though each were contending with each ; until at length, one solitary croak, deeper, and louder, and fiercer than any hitherto heard, appears to awaken a new spirit amid the sable conclave, for a dead stillness immediately succeeds to the previous clamour ; and in a few moments the heavy and monotonous flapping of wings is heard, and the whole troop disperse in different directions.

When all have disappeared, a female figure, clad in long and flowing garments, so dazzlingly white that where the pale rays of the moon rest upon them they take the gleam of silver, appears suddenly beneath the rock, as though she had sprung from the grassy soil ; and throwing back her veil, and stretching her thin arms and dilated eyes anxiously towards the east, breathing out sighs so terrible that they chill the heart-blood of those who chance to hear them ; she stands for a time immove-

able ; and then, as if unconsciously, suffering her arms to fall listlessly by her side, her veil once more envelopes her, and she disappears like a mist swept away by a passing wind.

It is the vision of the Lady Ilka.

The wars of Rakótsy have furnished their thousand legends to the wonder-lovers of Hungary ; and the chain of the Carpathians, and the lovely valley of the Wáag, have, between them, nearly monopolised all the traditional riches of the country. Trenschin, with its stately castle, its double fortress whence brother made war upon brother, and its wondrous well, dug by the hands of Infidel captives at the instigation of a true heart—Hrisko, with its spectral tenants, and stony sentinel—Betzko, with its ruthless lord, and death-fraught message—Barwinck, with its miraculous cross—the Margitta Rock, with its tale of jealousy and sacrifice—Winna, with its legend of sorcery and revenge—all these, numerous as they are, give little idea of the traditional wealth of this portion of Pannonia ; and the tale of the Raven Rock is also drawn from the same inexhaustible source, and derived nearly from the same period of the national history.

In the beginning of the past century, during the last struggle of the Rakótzy faction, the powerful castle of Szomolán at the foot of the Wetterling, was partially garrisoned by Imperial troops, whom its lord had invited thither to strengthen his own retainers against any attack of the patriot (or as the Imperialists designated them, the rebel) party. But, anxious to take a more active part in the war than the mere defence of his own stronghold would have enabled him to do, the Baron joined the main body of the army; and deputed the government of the castle to his friend and ally Ellewény, whom he had known from boyhood; satisfied that by so doing he had provided both for his own ambition, and for the safety of his possessions.

Previously, however, to his departure, the Baron was careful to inspect the defences and resources of the garrison; and to satisfy himself that the fortress was in a fitting condition to sustain even a prolonged siege, should circumstances render it necessary. The precaution was soon proved to have been both wise and prudent; for although the war had taken its rise on the northern frontier, it rolled its ensanguined billows rapidly onward, until at length it

reached this distant point ; and the castle of Szomolán, though of minor importance in itself, became an object of vast consequence to each of the conflicting parties, from the fact that its position caused it to command the highway which traverses the White Mountain to the confines of Moravia ; and that thus its possession gave the key of this important road.

The fact did not for a moment escape the vigilance of Bertsény, the kinsman and chief general of Rakótzy ; and he accordingly deputed the duty of its capture to Ladislaus Otskay, with strict orders to possess himself not only of the castle itself, but also of the pass ; which he doubted not would be found to be well guarded at every convenient point.

Ellewény saw the approach of the hostile troops, long ere they reached the castle ; but the warder had scarcely proclaimed their apparent strength from the tower, when the blast of a trumpet summoned the Suzerain to surrender in the name of the Emperor. The imperious mandate was, of course, disregarded ; and Otskay forthwith commenced his operations for a siege. He was, however, enabled to do so in a very imperfect manner, as he had not a

sufficient force under his command to carry his plans into full effect : added to which, having calculated on taking the fortress by surprise, he had only mounted troops ; and the infantry not having been able to keep pace with him, he was compelled to wait their arrival, by which means a great deal of time was lost, of which the besieged did not fail to take advantage.

Foreseeing that the capture of Szomolán would prove a more difficult enterprise than had been anticipated, Otskay, during the delay, wrote very pressingly to Bertsény for reinforcements ; but as that general was directing all his force upon Tyrnau, which he was anxious to take before Heister could come to its rescue with the Imperial troops, in order to establish his head-quarters there, his representations were disregarded.

Ellewény, meanwhile, was actively employed in strengthening his defences, and in assuring the means of effectual resistance ; for he did not suffer himself to be for a moment deceived into a belief that the present supineness of the enemy was likely to be of long duration : nor did he suspect that Bertsény, on the eve of a decisive step, and himself

crippled for want of artillery, would hesitate to dispatch an additional force to the assistance of the besiegers.

But although France had in reality assisted the rebel party with both money and ordnance, as well as gunners and engineers, she had done so in very insufficient quantity; nor did the fortresses in their possession afford them the means of supplying the deficiency.

The reiterated remonstrances of Otskay, consequently only in so far succeeded, that Bertsény promised to forward to him a few pieces of artillery without further delay; but at the same time he warned him that he must entirely depend upon his own resources, as no further assistance could be rendered to him at a moment when the main army required all the strength which it could muster.

This decisive communication convinced Otskay that he would be compelled to raise the siege; but previously to so doing, he resolved upon a night-attack, in order that his apparent Quixotism might not draw down upon him the ridicule of his comrades. This determination, however, only rendered matters worse; for Ellewény at once detected the

design, and being well prepared, he kept his garrison on the alert: and when Otskay made his attack, thinking that the besieged were sleeping in fancied security, he found that they were in reality not only wide awake, but even under arms.

He had now, however, gone too far to change his purpose; retreat would have involved dishonour; and he accordingly resolved rather to forfeit his life in an abortive attempt to render himself master of the fortress, than to tarnish the fair fame which he had won by years of courage and success.

Animated by this chivalrous feeling he was the first upon the walls; and cheering on his followers, with a shout of "Forward to Victory!" he had gained the centre of the ladder, when owing to the weight of those who thronged closely in his rear, it broke under them, and the whole party were flung, maimed and bleeding, into the ditch.

During the confusion occasioned by this unhappy accident, Ellewény made a sortie at the head of a strong party of men-at-arms; and after a brave resistance on the part of the besiegers, many of them were made prisoners, and the remainder were compelled to retreat.

Among the captives was Otskay, who having been unable to disengage himself from the bodies of those who had fallen upon him, and faint from loss of blood, had been made prisoner, to the utter discomfiture of the rebels ; and the castellan, overjoyed at the happy chance which had placed their brave leader in his hands, and full of admiration of the gallantry which had led him to dare so brave a venture, received him with courtesy and respect. He had not, moreover, forgotten that in their youth they had been friends, and that no unkindness had ever come between them ; until the breaking out of the civil war, in which they were still engaged, had parted them as effectually as though they had never previously met ; although the castle of Otskay was but a few leagues from that of Szomolán, and might have been seen from its ramparts, had not a high hill interposed between them.

When they met, Ellewény frankly offered to make his old associate a prisoner on his parole, leaving to him the whole range of the fortress ; but the brave soldier accepted the courtesy with reluctance, as he hoped soon to be exchanged, or delivered by ransom ; well knowing that his services

were too valuable to the cause of Rakótzy, to render that prince willing to abandon him for any length of time to captivity. This reluctance, however, yielded before the bright eyes of the Lady Ilka, the daughter of Ellewény; who, when summoned by her father, came, followed by her attendants, to tend the wounds of the prisoner; which she did so tenderly, and with such sweet willingness, that Otskay forgot their smart under her light and healing touch.

The legend says that she was very beautiful; with a brow all softness, and an eye all fire: the very bride for a hero! And so young withal, and so innocent, that the dew of life's morning was yet fresh upon her heart, for the scorching beams of passion's sun had never touched it.

Otskay, although already widowed, was still in the very bloom of his existence, and eminently handsome; with a reputation for bravery well calculated to win the love of a high-souled woman; and thus it was not remarkable that daily communion soon induced on the part of the lady, as warm an affection towards the gallant captive, as her bright eyes had already awakened in his own

bosom. It seemed, too, as though her father either never contemplated, or if indeed cognizant of the attachment, entertained no wish to reject, the addresses of Otskay ; nor did he ever interfere in the hourly and long-protracted conversations of the lovers, save when the blushing Ilka at times expressed her regret that so renowned a soldier, and popular a noble, should have wielded a rebel weapon ; when he seconded her energetic arguments with solid reasonings, and sober calculations of the probable future.

But Ladislaus Otskay, deeply enamoured as he was, remained deaf to every representation ; declaring that he could not, in honour, abandon a failing cause ; and thus, although the subject was constantly renewed, the captive remained true to the interests of Rakótzy.

The capture of Otskay caused a great sensation throughout the rebel army ; and Bertsény regretted it the more, as he had designed to entrust to his gallantry and courage an enterprise of considerable risk and difficulty. Immediate negotiations were set on foot, and a prisoner of equal rank in the Imperial forces proposed in exchange ; but as the

general-in-chief, owing to the peculiar position of the insurgents, could not himself urge forward the arrangement, considerable delay took place in accomplishing his purpose; but it was ultimately brought to bear, and Ellewény received orders to conduct his prisoner under a safe escort to Tyrnau, where his substitute was already awaiting his arrival.

Greatly as the prospect of recovered liberty rejoiced the spirit of Otskay, the idea of his separation from Ilka was rife with bitterness; nor could he consent to leave Szomolán without declaring his passion, and receiving in return the plighted troth of the maiden, whose heart he already felt to be his own. The opportunity of so doing presented itself the same evening; and, during the absence of Ellewény upon the walls to inspect the twilight watch, he poured forth all the feelings of his soul; and kneeling at the feet of the trembling girl, awaited in breathless impatience for her answering words.

Who can doubt their import? Ilka loved him, and she was too ingenuous to deny it. She had never even heard of coquetry; and her single-heartedness taught her a noble lesson at that inter-

resting moment. She not only admitted that he was dear to her, but that even as he had been the first, so also must he be the last to touch her heart. The delighted and exulting Otskay, as he withdrew a costly ring from his finger, and placed it upon that of the gentle girl, whispered a vow that immediately on the termination of the war he would return to Szomolán, and claim his bride at the hands of her father.

The words had scarcely escaped his lips, when Ilka, releasing herself from his clasp, rose, and hurriedly prepared to leave the hall.

“Where go you?” asked Ladislaus, anxiously; “Surely you would not leave me at such a moment!”

“Detain me not;” was the reply: “I go to seek the father, whose love and tenderness you have just recalled to my mind. I fear that I should not have thus declared my love, until —”

“Nay, nay—you wrong both yourself and me, dear Ilka, by this ill-timed self-reproach;” said Otskay passionately: “Was not your father the friend of my youth? And was I not indebted to his experience and wisdom for many a lesson of virtue

and worthiness? Can you then deem that he will disapprove your affection for one whom he has himself loved?"

"Oh, talk not of his disapproval!" interposed the maiden; "that indeed I dare not contemplate; but we should have no secret in which he does not share."

"Nor will we, my own love;" said Otskay; and his lips were on her hand, and his arm about her slender waist, when Ellewény suddenly stood before them.

"What is this, my Lord Baron?" sternly demanded the Castellan; "I will not think that you have abused my confidence in your honour!"

"St. Stephen forbid that you should so far wrong me!" retorted Ladislaus Otskay; "and that where I ask a father I should find a foe. I love your daughter; and was about to seek you, to demand her hand in marriage."

Ellewény was silent for a moment, as he glanced from one to the other; and ere he replied, the blushing face of his only child was already hidden in his bosom. "Otskay," he said at length, as he extended his hand to the suitor: "Why have you

borne arms against your sovereign ? Even loving you as I do, I cannot give my precious Ilka to a rebel. You would have been the pride of my age, had you not been the enemy of my emperor. But now—what can I say to you ? How can I answer *her*?"

"The war will soon be at an end ;" urged Otskay : "Even now, were Rakótzy prosperous, I would retire to my castle, and forswear all further interference for our sweet Ilka's sake : but I cannot seem to forsake him in his need. Suffer us then to exchange our plight-troth ; and should I survive the battle which is now about to decide the fate of Hungary : and should (as much I fear !) that fate be adverse to the patriot cause, I will do homage for my past rebellion to the emperor, and swear never again to draw my sword save in his defence, or in that of my own personal honour."

"I will not refuse the pledge you offer, and shall trust implicitly to your good faith for its fulfilment ;" said Ellewény kindly : "but I will permit no vows to be exchanged between my daughter and yourself, until you can meet me breast to breast in my own hall, a free man, against whom no tongue can

be loud ; and then, and then only, Ilka, and all that I possess shall be yours, without a day of needless delay."

Vain were all prayers and expostulations to shake the prudent resolution of Ellewény ; and although Otskay pleaded that the troth-plight would be his solace in the battle-field, and even induced the weeping girl to confess that it would also be hers in the hours of anxiety and solitude, the Castellan never wavered for an instant ; but warning the lovers that the hour of the Baron's departure was at hand, urged them to part at once ; and finally left them so brief an interval for their leave-taking, that they had scarcely time to arrange a medium of correspondence, and to appoint a place of meeting, whenever Otskay might be enabled to escape for a day from his military duties, and to approach Szomolán.

As the most safe and fitting spot of tryst, they decided on the Raven Rock, to which, from its vicinity to the castle, the maiden might venture without incurring much risk ; while, from its sheltered position, the patriot leader might also visit it without apparent danger.

As they formed this decision the trumpet rang out shrilly from the court-yard. The little troop selected to escort Otskay to Tyrnau were prepared for departure ; and the lover had only time to fold his weeping mistress to his heart, and to whisper once more : “ Bless thee—bless thee, love ! remember the Raven Rock !” ere Ellewény entered the hall to summon his charge, and to give a parting embrace to his daughter. It was a bitter moment to all the party, but it was a brief one ; for ere another gush of tears had deluged the pale cheeks of the drooping girl, the whole troop were in the saddle. She brushed off the dimming drops as she took a last look ; and then—she was alone ! The train had passed the drawbridge ; and his memory was all that was left to her of her gallant lover.

Ladislaus Otskay was welcomed back with enthusiasm by all the patriot army ; and the greeting was still upon many a lip, when he was once more warned that a new expedition of importance was about to be confided to his bravery and skill, upon which hinged no inconsiderable portion of the remaining prospects of his party. The Imperial General Riczan was approaching by the pass of

the White Mountains to attack the troops of Prince Rakótzy ; a fact which he had ascertained by his spies ; but of the probable strength of the forces about to be brought against him, they had been utterly unable, from the nature of the country, to obtain any certain information. It was to impede, and, if possible, to destroy this menacing enemy, that Otskay, with a considerable body of men, was again detached from the main army ; and he accepted the adventurous honour with the greater alacrity, that his duty led him back to the vicinity of Szomolán.

The progress of his march was, however, tedious and difficult, for the forces under Riczan proved to be so much more numerous and formidable than the authorities at Tyrnau had anticipated, that the greatest precaution soon became necessary to the safety of Otskay's expedition ; and he even deemed it expedient to dispatch a messenger to Bertsény, demanding immediate reinforcements, without which he felt that he should be utterly unable to make head against the Imperial troops ; and while awaiting the expected succours, the band encamped on the highest point of the mountain, under cover

of a ridge of rock, in a long hollow still known as the Devil's Furrow.

A tradition is attached to this spot which accounts for the singularity of its name ; and I would relate it, were it not that it would break into the thread of my narrative, and might consequently be unwelcome to some of my hearers."

" Nay, the very title of your legend will be its excuse :" abruptly interposed the pale student ; " Let us, with the permission of the ladies, be made familiar with the peculiar locality of Otskay's camp."

" Be it so then :" was the reply ; " It is a mere traditionary sketch ; and will occupy but a few moments."

The Castle of Karláthkő (Conrad's Stone) was the patrimony of two brothers of good family, the elder of whom was made prisoner by the Turks, and retained so long in captivity, without being enabled to communicate with his relatives, that the younger, who had thus become undisputed successor to the hereditary stronghold, had altogether forgotten the possibility of his re-appearance.

Years passed on, and Oswald alternately fought

and feasted, without giving many thoughts to the memory of his less happy brother, whose continued existence he declared to be impossible ; although a rumour was abroad at one period that a pilgrim had made his way to Karláthkö, who had escaped from the chains of the Infidels, and had assured his host that Peter still lived in the bitter slavery which he had himself so lately shared ; and that he had earnestly conjured him, should he succeed in evading the vigilance of the Infidels, and in reaching their common country, to seek out his brother, and to implore of him that he would without delay forward to Constanstople the ransom-money demanded for his redemption.

To this tale Oswald either did, or affected to deny credence ; and after the departure of the stranger the story soon ceased to be remembered ; when suddenly, during the festivities consequent on the birth of an heir to the house of Karláthkö, Peter appeared before the gates of the castle ; and having been recognised by the seneschal, was instantly admitted.

Great was the astonishment of the assembled guests, but it was nevertheless weak compared

with the consternation of the younger brother, who at once beheld himself by this unwelcome apparition reduced into the mere co-heir of an inheritance which he had for many years considered as his own, and found sufficiently narrow for the supply of his necessities.

It was not, however, so easy to refuse belief to the living presence of the emancipated prisoner as it had been to set aside the tale of a wandering stranger; and Oswald had consequently no alternative save to fold his arms about the neck to which in that moment of mortification he would rather have fitted the bowstring from which it had so miraculously escaped; and to receive with a smile the noisy and excited congratulations that fell to his share amid the general recognition.

As the feast progressed, and Peter told his tale of suffering, Oswald was buried in dark and bitter thought. He had never loved his brother, nor had he shed a tear over the misfortunes whose very recital was now eliciting the sympathy of all who heard them. Could it then be that he must really resign half of that patrimony which he had so long considered to be exclusively his own to this resusci-

tated kinsman? There was incipient hate in the very question, as he put it to his own heart; and it was consequently with a vehemence which negatived its intention, that he swore, when Peter with some asperity alluded to the messenger whom he had sent to Karláthkö to demand his ransom, that no such errand had ever been performed; and that he had never had cause to doubt the tale of a retainer, who had declared to him that he beheld his lord fall in battle, covered with so many and such dangerous wounds as must ensure his speedy death under the hands of his barbarous masters, the Turks.

Peter was compelled to receive the assertion, and in his turn affected the utmost faith in his brother's words; declaring at the same time that his unhappy fortunes had been the pure result of accident, over which neither the one nor the other could have exercised any control; and stating as he had returned to his country a solitary man, while Oswald had surrounded himself by a wife and children, he would waive all retrospective arrangements, and content himself with an equal proportion of the family property from the day of his re-appearance at Karláthkö.

This decision was greeted by admiring plaudits from all present, and Oswald was fain to appear as delighted as the rest; although at the same moment he suggested that a division of the lands at that particular period would involve so much trouble and difficulty, that he trusted his brother would reside with him for the present in the castle, until a convenient season should arrive for the partition which he desired.

This proposition appeared so reasonable that Peter at once consented; and by so doing became a guest in the home of his fathers, and an intruder where he should have been the master; a fact of which he was not slow in making the discovery. All power and authority were in the hands of Oswald; for long habit had taught the retainers of Karláthkö to look upon his will as law; and thus, although many hearts yearned towards the elder and braver brother, every hand and head was obedient to the younger.

This was a state of things that Peter could ill brook. He naturally felt that he had already undergone more than his legitimate share of hardship and dependence; nor could he blind himself

to the fact that the term of his sufferings might have been greatly abridged had the selfishness of Oswald been less decided. It is therefore not surprising that he soon began to chafe under so flagrant a system of injustice as that to which he was thus made a victim ; and that from entreaties and expostulations, he at length grew to threats and violence ; but Oswald was proof against both the one and the other ; and Peter had consequently no alternative save force.

On a particular occasion, when they had parted in anger on the one side, and defiance on the other, with feelings upon both which should never have grown up between such near kinsmen, Oswald hurriedly shut himself into his room, and Peter paced backwards and forwards in the great hall, striving to overcome the rage that was swelling at his heart ; but it would not be appeased ; and weary of the perpetual contentions which were making his present days of freedom almost as bitter as his past years of captivity, he resolved at once to terminate the unnatural controversy by expostulating with his brother for the last time ; and then, should he still prove inexorable, of laying a detailed and

formal statement of his grievance before the Emperor.

Having come to this determination, he passed through the low and narrow arch that communicated with the inner gallery of the castle, and flung open the door of his brother's apartment, at the very moment when he was exclaiming in a fierce and determined voice: "You are right; Peter must die; he has left us no other alternative—and yet——"

As the words reached him, Peter himself stepped across the threshold, and stood face to face with Oswald and his foster-mother, an aged woman, who had retained a great influence over her nursling from his birth. They were visibly and painfully startled at his appearance, and the eyes of Oswald fell, and his cheek blanched beneath the cold stern gaze of the intruder. But the withered crone, though her heart trembled, greeted him with a smile; and was about to speak, when he strode past her, and approaching his brother, asked in a tone whose unnatural calm contrasted frightfully with the dark passions which were at work within that narrow chamber, whether it was his intention to re-

deem the pledge that he had given before their assembled friends, and to restore to him the half of their patrimony.

Oswald replied by renewed excuses ; and so great was his embarrassment, that even had not his brother overheard the impious words which he was uttering as he entered the apartment, he would have discovered at once that some unusual cause had shaken the spirit of the agitated man. As it was, however, he made no comment on his visible emotion, but contented himself by retorting with threats and mysterious hints, that drove Oswald almost into madness ; and then, warning him that he had spoken upon the subject for the last time, he turned upon his heel and left the chamber.

As he disappeared, the old woman laid her bony hand upon the arm of her foster-son, and whispered : “ Did I not tell you so ? There’s mischief in him. How know you but by to-morrow’s dawn he will be in the saddle, and away to Vienna to tell his tale to the Emperor ? My lord, my lord ; this must not be. Do you love him ? I tell you, *no*—You never loved him as brother should love brother—and you have been parted for long years—parted body and spirit—

why then do you hesitate? You have a fair young wife, a noble son; they at least love you; and will you sacrifice both yourself and them for this stranger-kinsman, who comes back upon you like a spirit of darkness, to make your feast scant, and your cup bitter?"

"What can be done?" asked Oswald in a hoarse accent.

"Done!—Do you ask me what can be done, Lord of Karláthkó?" demanded the woman with a scornful laugh; "Much—everything—A drugged draught of wine at the meal of to-night, and you will no longer have a hungry brother to beard you in your father's fortress. Leave all to me—"

"Do as you will;" muttered Oswald moodily; "but do not ask me to share in the deed."

Again the withered crone laughed her laugh of bitterness; "No, no; the profit shall be yours, and you shall come out pure. You shall neither pour forth the drug, nor hand the cup. Again I say, leave all to me."

And thus they parted; secure that ere the morrow they should be freed from the claims of the

intruder. But Peter had overheard enough to know that there was no longer safety for him in the home of his childhood; and ere the two conspirators separated he had already fled from the castle.

The rage of Oswald and his confidant when they learnt this startling fact, was so great, that instigated by the old woman, the misguided noble swore a frightful oath that rather than share with his brother the possessions he had so long looked upon as his own, he would lose every acre of land, and every mass of stone, and go forth upon the world with his wife and son, a beggar. Nor did he swerve from his vow when an Imperial mandate arrived from Vienna, commanding that he should immediately present himself before the Emperor, and justify the conduct he had pursued. He received the envoy, on the contrary, with haughty disrespect; and bade him tell his master that he would resist even to the death all interference, come from whomsoever it might; an answer which so exasperated the sovereign that he forthwith dispatched a second messenger, accompanied by some law officers, and Peter himself, to Karláthkö, with instructions to draw a boundary line through the

property, and to assign a moiety to each of the brothers.

The party, however, fell into an ambuscade at the entrance of the forest, for as the Imperial envoys had never contemplated the possibility of such an overt act of treachery and disloyalty, they were taken by surprise, and soon overpowered; and although Peter, anticipating the result of his capture, fought almost with the desperation of insanity, his single arm could not suffice to turn the fortunes of the day. The struggle was consequently fierce and brief; and Oswald no sooner found himself master of the field than he threw his brother into irons; informing his companions with a derisive laugh, that they were at liberty to return to Vienna, and to carry the tidings of their expedition to the Emperor.

The reply of the Imperial officers was a warning that the anger of the sovereign was not to be lightly braved; and they concluded by counselling the unnatural brother to remove the chains from the limbs of his kinsman, and to obey the Emperor's order. Enraged beyond measure at their perseverance, and the courage with which they main-

tained their dignity even while totally in his power, Oswald turned fiercely upon them, and commanded that they would instantly depart from his territories, lest evil should ensue ; declaring at the same time that he would not resign one inch of land until the fiend should come in his own proper person to draw the boundary line ; and following up the assertion by pledging to it the salvation of his soul !

As the words passed his lips, a sudden and thick darkness fell upon every object ; the giant oaks groaned and trembled beneath the hoarse gusts of wind that swept along the sky ; and ere another breath could be drawn, a tremendous plough was seen advancing towards the party, driven by a gigantic form whose fiery breath lit up the forest, and parched the leaves as it touched them, forming an avenue of blight and desolation. A shuddering and writhing woman dragged the ponderous machine along, howling beneath the lash of the demon at her side ; and as she passed near the cowering group who were spectators of the hideous scene, she turned her glaring and blood-shot eyes upon Oswald, who despite the agonized distortion of her features, instantly recognised

in the wretch before him his abandoned foster-mother!

On moved the demon-plough, forming so deep a furrow that it might have buried a line of human habitations—and then all was over! The light broke forth again: the wind was hushed: and as the ill-assorted party looked around, each found himself alone.

The hideous miracle had, however, sufficed; for Oswald no longer contended with his fate. On his return to the castle he found his foster-mother stretched on the pavement of the hall, a corpse. There were marks of fingers upon her throat, larger than those which could have been left there by the grasp of a common mortal, and the horror-stricken noble turned aside with loathing: and having shut himself into his chamber, knelt down in prayer, until the dawn summoned him again to more active life.

His first step when he came forth was to summon a party of his followers, with whom he set off in pursuit of his brother: and having encountered him on the confines of the forest, he flung himself upon his neck, and asked alike forgiveness and oblivion

of the past. Both were granted; and thenceforward the two Barons of Karláthkö lived in harmony and peace: but to their dying hour no allusion was ever made by either to the demon-traced boundary-line, still existing to attest the *veracity* of the legend; and which became on one occasion highly serviceable; for when some doubts arose among the authorities of the counties of Presburg and Neutra as to the exact extent of their several jurisdictions, it was mutually agreed that the “Devil’s Furrow” should serve as the line of demarkation between them: and it continues such to this day, having been left precisely in its original state, save in one spot where it is traversed by the high road which connects the aforenamed counties.

Thus much for the local tradition, which has occupied more time than I anticipated. I must now return to my principal narrative, whose threads I have so long suffered to escape me. I had already mentioned that the troops of Otskay were encamped in the Devil’s Furrow, where they were at once sheltered and concealed; and I now proceed to tell you that on their way thither they passed near the castle of Szomolán; and were no sooner bivou-

acked, than Otskay dispatched a trusty messenger to the fortress, charged with a letter to the lady Ilka, entreating her to meet him the following evening at the Raven Rock.

The maiden was punctual to the appointment; but the joy of their meeting was damped by the assurance of Ilka, that her father's resolution continued unchanged; and that they must await with what patience they might, the termination of the war; as, under the present circumstances, all hope of their early union was vain.

"Even now, my beloved Ladislaus;" she said mournfully, as she wreathed her white fingers among his black and clustering hair; "even now you are meditating fresh outrage against your sovereign, and deepening your weight of guilt in my father's eyes; even now, you are incurring the risk of forfeiting for ever all chance of pardon."

"You could not love a coward, Ilka?"

"Fie on you for the question!" was the proud reply: "Am I not the daughter of the Count Elléwény, whose gallantry has, like your own, almost passed into a proverb? Is it not possible to be brave in a bad cause?"

"Come, come :" smiled Otskay playfully, anxious to evade the subject ; " I will not suffer my pretty bride to play the censor, and chide her chosen lord ! This war once over, I will turn Castellan in right earnest, and sit as quietly in my own hall, as my lady in her bower-chamber. I shall be cited as the home-staying Baron, who cannot stray beyond the spell of his wife's eyes."

But although he spoke jestingly, the heart of Otskay was heavy ; for Ilka looked so beautiful, as she stood beside him with her hand clasped in his, that he thought he had never loved her so passionately as at that moment ; he consequently renewed all his entreaties, all his prayers ; but although his fair mistress promised to exert her influence over her father in his behalf, she warned him that she saw no prospect of success.

When they had parted, the Baron followed cautiously at some distance, with his drawn weapon in his hand, until he saw her safely pass the postern of the castle ; and then, with a deep sigh, and a spirit torn by conflicting emotions, he turned slowly away, and regained his encampment.

On the morrow he was joined by the reinforce-

ments from Bertsény, the tents were struck, and he proceeded on his march. From day to day his scouts fell in with those of the advancing enemy ; but as the ground was favorable for concealment, and that, unless some decisive step were hazarded, this species of desultory and unsatisfactory warfare might prove almost interminable without effecting any adequate result, the Imperial General resolved to force the pass with his entire strength.

Otskay, informed of the intention of his adversary, while he appeared to meet the enemy with all the troops under his command, and made a gallant shew from the judicious distribution of his men ; secretly detached a strong body of infantry, whom he dispatched by circuitous and unfrequented tracks, under the guidance of a trusty forester, and who ultimately fell upon Riczan's rear ; paralyzing his artillery, which, owing to the narrowness of the pass, had not space to operate ; and compelling the Imperialist leader to attempt a retreat. The endeavour was, however, vain ; for the soldiers of Otskay, flushed with success, pushed their advantage so bravely that ere long they had thoroughly defeated the little army, and captured its general ;

while those of the Imperialists who could effect their escape, dispersed at once, satisfied of the utter futility of any further attempt at opposition under such unfavorable circumstances.

Events were, however, progressing less happily for Rakótsy at the head-quarters of his army. The feuds between the rival nobles, Bertsény and For-gáts, occasioned great inconvenience, and established a strong party feeling, which, at length, became perilous to the cause itself; and, at a period when their hostility was at its height, General Heister vacated Presburg, and marching rapidly through the country, raised the siege of Tyrnau. Weary of the procrastinating warfare which had so long convulsed the country, without affording any prospect of a definite result, he avoided all skirmishing by which his strength might be diminished, and prepared for a pitched battle; and when Otskay, conscious of the great advantage which he had just secured to his party, and of the individual courage and gallantry that he had himself displayed, from the hour in which he joined the patriot army, expected to be received with open arms, he was mortified to discover that the general interest was forgotten in

personal jealousy, and that this ill-timed selfishness had destroyed, or suppressed, all better feeling.

So coldly, indeed, was he looked upon on all hands when he declared his resolution not to become the champion of either party, nor the tool of either faction, that he could not conceal his annoyance. He at once saw that the cause of Rakótzy would be the sacrifice of this untoward bitterness ; for the partisans on both sides gradually became as virulent as their principals : and scarcely a day passed which did not bring with it the intelligence of the defection of some petty noble and his retainers ; while the demonstrations on the part of the Imperialists became more decided.

At a council of war, over which the patriot prince himself presided, it was ultimately resolved to change the position of the army, in order that it might lean on the White Mountains, and thus keep the passage open on the right wing of the Wáag, which the victory of Otskay had secured : and in order to do this effectually, it was suggested that the capture of the fortress of Szomolán was imperative. Otskay immediately volunteered for this new service ; being anxious, as he stated, to wash

out the stain which his reputation had received by his capture, and subsequent imprisonment within its ramparts.

His offer was promptly accepted ; and collecting his forces, he lost no time in surrounding the castle ; when, having so done, he forwarded a dispatch to the Count Ellewény, calling upon him to surrender to the patriot forces. Within this missive he enclosed a letter to the Lady Ilka, full of affection and hope, requesting her to meet him at the appointed rendezvous ; and suggesting that the companionship of her father might prove highly beneficial, both to their public and private interests.

The surrender was refused, as Otskay while penning the summons had felt convinced that it would be ; but the midnight meeting, to his great delight, was granted without hesitation ; and long ere the moment of tryst arrived, he was already standing under the shadow of the Raven Rock, awaiting with impatience the appearance of his mistress.

At length a step was heard, but it was not that of the maiden ; Otskay started forward, and Ellewény stood before him.

"This is no time to trifle;" he said gravely: "I come ——"

"But Ilka?" urged the Baron; "does she refuse?"

"Speak not of her at such a moment;" persisted the Castellan: "You have summoned me to this meeting in the name of my country, for which I would sacrifice my life. What would you ask of me?"

"I would beseech you earnestly to abandon all design of defending the fortress, and thus endangering both your own life and that of your daughter; for I declare to you, on the honour of a true man and a soldier, that all effectual resistance is hopeless."

"Then I will die upon the walls, and my body shall be the last obstacle to the entrance of the rebels."

"And Ilka?" demanded the Baron: "What is to become of her?"

"What heaven wills!" was the calm reply. "She had better die the daughter of a brave and true man, than live to be branded as the offspring of a traitor and a coward. And now, Ladislaus Otskay, let us talk of yourself. I believe that you would

serve me, and consider that you are even now doing so. Do not deceive yourself. It is you who need counsel. I know that you are here at the head of a large force: that Szomolán is surrounded by your troops, and that it will in all probability fall before the strength which you have brought against it. The triumph of the hour is yours; but, Otskay, how has it been purchased? Do you not stand here a rebel against your sovereign? I am an old man; my hair is grey, and my temples are bare; and yet, I swear to you, that even to possess your youth and vigour, and the prospect of long years of fame and success, I would not barter my age and my weakness against all your advantages. I speak freely to you, for my child loves you, and she is my only one; and thus my heart yearns to all that is dear to *her*! I beseech you, then, young man——”

“No more, no more;” said the Baron, as he seized the hand of the Castellan, and pressed it with agitated fervour; “We will meet again.” And as the words trembled on his lips, he suddenly turned an angle of the rock, and disappeared.

The business of the siege commenced at dawn,

but it was languidly carried on. The spirit of the Baron was not in the work, and his supineness soon infected his followers. While things were thus situated, a letter from the army was delivered to Otskay, which had been forwarded by a special messenger, and by which he was informed that the hostility between the rival generals of Rakótzy had risen to such a height, that it had required the personal interference of the prince to prevent a battle between the two factions, under the very eyes of the common enemy. The patriot cause was hourly losing ground, and all was gloom and despondency.

With Otskay this was decisive. In half an hour a second summons to surrender was dispatched to Ellewény; and again a letter was enclosed, suggesting another interview at the Raven Rock, on matters of deep importance to all parties; to which was subjoined an earnest entreaty that the Lady Ilka would accompany her father, as the present state of her lover's mind required the soothing influence of her presence.

Ellewény, conscious that his words had made a deep impression on the spirit of the Baron at their

last meeting, and anxious for his daughter's sake to save him from the ruin which he felt to be gathering thick and fast about him, did not hesitate to accede to his request ; and once more the lovers met. The sober arguments of the Castellan, and the bright eyes of the maiden, at length overcame the lingering scruples of the patriot general ; and Ellewény undertook to negotiate the pardon of the offender.

The reputation of Otskay was so well and generally established, that he knew the task would be an easy one ; for so brave an officer must be welcome to any cause ; and thus the terms were speedily arranged. The castle of Szomolán was to be surrendered to the troops of Rakótzy ; and Otskay and his retainers were to enter the service of the Emperor, protected by the Imperial pledge that they should never be compelled to bear arms against their late comrades ; a complete amnesty being granted for the past.

These conditions the Castellan undertook to propose, and to urge on the Imperial commander-in-chief ; and although the present formidable attitude of Otskay would probably militate greatly against him, still the zealous Ellewény declared

himself sanguine of the result of his interposition.

The night had worn away during their conference; and, fearful lest the dawn should betray them, the party were compelled to separate; but the lovers consoled themselves with the hope of an early and a final re-union; and even the grave Castellan, ere he led his daughter away, laid his hand on the graceful head of the young soldier, and murmured out: “Bless thee, my son,—the hope of my old age!”

On the following day the siege was renewed with vigour, for Otskay once more put forth all his energies; and it was apparent that the fortress, strong as it was, and ably as it was defended, would be utterly unable to cope for any length of time with the force which was brought against it. And while the work of war went on at Szomolán, Ellewény’s messenger was speeding to the headquarters of the Imperialist general Heister, whence he returned in a few days with the Emperor’s ratification of the treaty proposed by the Castellan.

On the morrow, Otskay announced his intention of carrying the fortress by assault; but the prepara-

tions were scarcely completed when it surrendered, on condition that the garrison should be permitted to march out with their arms in their hands, which was conceded.

Szomolán, once in the possession of his people, Otskay struck his tents; and by hasty marches joined the main army, where he found every thing in motion, and Rakótsy preparing to give battle to Heister, whose hostile movements left him no power of choice. The common danger had created one common interest, and the feud between Bertsény and Forgáts had been forgotten, in the approach of a battle which must decide the fate of the prince whom they had followed in his adventurous fortunes.

Immediately on the arrival of Otskay, he was ordered to the right wing, to oppose the attack of the Imperial infantry, and to surprise the enemy, should it prove practicable, in the rear. But, alas! his spirit was no longer in the cause; and when the moment arrived in which much was expected from his well-known gallantry, he made the signal that was to decide the fate of a contest already too unequal; and with his followers went over to the enemy!

This unexpected misfortune paralyzed the powers of the patriots : they still fought bravely, but they contended against hope ; the Imperialists swept all before them like a devouring torrent ; and the defeat of Rakótzy's devoted army was complete. To avoid annihilation, they were compelled to vacate the whole valley of the Wáag.

Who should look into the soul of Otskay ? He had loved Rakótzy—Rakótzy had trusted him—He had vowed himself to a cause which he had abandoned, to secure a private and personal interest—He was a reproach to the friend he had forsaken—a renegade to the master he had adopted—and the bold soldier of other days could never be restored.

He went home—he trod his old ancestral halls—but he felt that he was not the same being who had gone forth—true, and frank, and loyal—with a frown for treachery, and a curse for falsehood. He went home ; and that home required a light, for all was darkness in the spirit of the man who had betrayed his friend. The Lady Ilka and her father returned to their home also—to Szomolán ; and it required scant time to restore its ramparts, and walls, and battlements. But the high heart of

woman, though it may for a time forgive, or overlook, all the error which grows out of a worship of itself, is soon true to its own dignity ; and easy as it was to repair the ravages of war on the masonry of the old fortress, the love of the noble-spirited Ilka had been shaken beyond the power of time.

Otskay and his mistress were affianced : all was joy and hilarity about them ; and they had little leisure to mourn over the fallen fortunes of a rebel prince. The Castle of Otsko was alive with gaiety ; and there was no opportunity of canvassing the bad faith of the lord of the revel, while his lamps shone brightly above a sumptuous banquet. Reproach sleeps while the world feasts ; for it is only at an Egyptian board that the skeleton takes its place among the guests.

But the Lady Ilka, even while she gloried in the homage which was paid to her affianced lord—even while she gazed on his high brow, and remembered that it was for her sake that he had become false alike to his cause and to himself, could not suppress a bitter sigh that it should be even thus ; and almost felt that she could have loved him more,

true to his faith and to his friend, though he had been stretched upon his bier, than here, in his ancestral halls in all the pride of his manly beauty, feasting at her side, loyal to his love, but false to his honour.

It was during this season of festivity that a horseman, whose steed was white with foam, and spent with haste, arrived from Verbó, to ask the immediate presence of the Baron at the death-bed of an old and tried friend, who had been seized with sudden and fatal sickness ; and who desired to see him once more before the grave parted them.

The call was too sacred to be evaded, even in the hour of rejoicing ; and Ladislaus Otskay taking a hurried leave of his affianced bride and his assembled guests, sprang to the saddle ; and, accompanied only by a single follower, galloped from the court-yard.

“ It is an evil omen ; ” murmured the Lady Ilka to herself, as she moved away from the casement whence she had watched his departure until an angle in the road hid him from her view : “ Death has summoned him from the bridal-altar ! ” And

as the dark foreboding fastened on her spirit, all her old and honouring love for Otskay—the love that had been pure and unblent with reproach—once more overflowed her heart. She forgot his political defalcation; or rather she wept that she should have blamed in him a weakness of which she had been herself the cause; and when at midnight she pressed a sleepless pillow, she sighed as she remembered the Raven Rock, and the tenderness of her departed lover. She dwelt upon his great personal beauty, his high reputation, and, above all, his devotion to herself. Not a breath of blame dimmed the mirror of her memory: all was bright, and pure; and when at length she dropped into the deep slumber of exhaustion, the form of Otskay rose before her as radiant as in her waking hours.

The lover himself meanwhile sped on in haste, and was rewarded for his zeal by a warm welcome from his friend, who had rallied from the very hope of his presence. He found him surrounded by a score of other nobles; and his amendment having restored the spirits of the party, Otskay discovered that he had only exchanged one scene

of revelry for another ; and thus, when the evening meal was concluded, and that he had convinced himself that he could not further benefit his friend, he began once more to yearn for home, and the bright eyes of the Lady Ilka. Remonstrance, entreaties, and even jests, were alike unavailing ; and after a friendly farewell from all around, the Baron mounted his horse, and attended by his trusty follower, proceeded homeward.

A wide forest intervened between Verbó and Otsko, and ere the travellers reached it, darkness had spread over the landscape, and blotted out every object. There was no moon ; and from the nature of the ground they were compelled to proceed slowly, lest they should wander from the road, and entangle themselves among the dense and far-spreading underwood. This was, however, a danger from which they were delivered by a still more evil chance ; for they had scarcely touched on the skirt of the forest, when a party of armed and disguised men sprang upon them ; and ere Otskay could draw his sword, he was flung violently from the saddle, his arms pinioned, his weapon taken from him, and he was finally lifted by a couple of the band into one

of the light wicker waggons of the country, upon a heap of hay; his servant flung up beside him; and without the utterance of a syllable by any of his captors, the half wild horses which were attached to the vehicle were urged to their utmost speed, and away they bounded like the wind, over a road where the slightest false step must have consigned them to destruction.

As morning broke, the Baron discovered that they had diverged into a cross path, and that they were rapidly approaching the mountains. In vain he interrogated the man who drove the waggon, and whom he discovered at a glance to be no common peasant of the province, familiar as he had proved himself to be with its intricate and difficult by-paths. No reply was vouchsafed; and it was only by a violent effort that the astonished captive could sufficiently change his position to perceive that the vehicle which he occupied was closely followed by a score of horsemen. The wiry animals that drew him, unencumbered by harness, and simply fastened by ropes to the waggon, obeyed the voice and gestures of their driver without other coercion, and whirled them on throughout the night

without apparent weariness or suffering. At dawn, they were checked before a squalid hut, in which the Baron and his servant were carefully secured ; and food, of which they stood greatly in need, was placed before them, while their captors bivouacked about the hovel until night ; when they once more resumed their hurried and mysterious journey.

At the termination of the third day, they reached the outskirts of Rakótzy's camp. Lawoska, a bold partisan of the prince, had pledged himself to take Otskay, even although he should be in the very rear of the Imperial army, and he had now redeemed his promise, by placing the Baron in the hands of the friends whom he had betrayed. Bitter were the feelings of the recreant soldier, when he found himself face to face with so many beside whom he had fought, and felt that every heart was shut against him ! Bertsény, not caring to take the responsibility of so important a prisoner upon himself, at once sent him on under a strong guard to Rakótzy, who was at Neuhäuzel ; and who, declining to look upon one whom he had loved, and by whom he had been so foully wronged, lest the memory of past feelings should stay the arm of justice, ordered

an immediate court-martial to be held on the deserter; and within three hours from his arrival in the patriot camp, his head was struck off, raised upon the point of a pike, and exposed to the execration of the whole army, in front of the Primate's palace, in which Rakótsy had taken up his temporary abode.

The rumour of this event soon spread over the country; and ere long reached Szomolán. For a few days it was concealed from the Lady Ilka; but at length a moment of inadvertence betrayed also to her the fearful tragedy. Since they parted, she had chidden her pride into subjection to her heart; and in listening to the hourly panegyrics of her father, who was never weary of vaunting the proselyte he had made, she soon taught herself to dwell only upon the nobler and more endearing qualities of her affianced bridegroom, and to sigh for his return. The pure stream of her spirit had flung off the polluting stain which had darkened its waters; and she was once more all hope, tenderness, and devotion.

It was in the full tide of this moral re-action that the blow fell. As she paced the southern rampart

of the castle in the soft twilight, casting from time to time a searching glance over the road by which Otskay must arrive, she was startled from her reverie by the mention of his name, coupled with some mournful expletive; and involuntarily she paused to listen. There and thus she heard all the tale: nor did the sentinel who recounted the fatal story, nor the newly arrived comrade to whom it was told, guess upon what distracted ears it had fallen.

The Lady Ilka was found prostrate upon the earth, and it was long ere the sobs and assiduities of her agonized father restored the light to her eye, and the colour to her lips; but at length she once more looked at him, and addressed him. But even then she called him Ladislaus, and bade him lead her to the altar, before her heart grew to stone; and told him that he must be quick—quick—for that it had become cold and hard already.

The pale girl was a maniac. She never shed a tear; and after the first rush of recovered vitality, did not again articulate a word; but every midnight when the moonlight lay long upon the earth she stole to the Raven Rock; and there, with her

thin arms stretched out in the direction of Neu-häuzel, she watched until the dawn. Every attempt to prevent this fearful vigil was in vain. Be the care of her attendants what it might, she contrived to evade it; and only became more irritable from opposition. And thus, after a time, they abandoned all idea of coercion, and permitted her to pursue her melancholy fancy undisturbed.

Ellewény, heart-broken as he was, yet outlived the child whom he had so fondly loved. Within a year she was found cold, and pale, and lifeless, under the shadow of the Raven Rock.

CHAPTER IX.

THE long legend of the Wetterling being at length brought to a close, the hour was proclaimed to be so late as to render it necessary that whoever undertook the next tradition must necessarily make it brief. The opportunity was, therefore, too favourable to be missed by such as were conscious of possessing defective memories ; and several volunteers accordingly presented themselves, among whom was the chaplain of the castle, a venerable Benedictine monk, held in great esteem by the host and his cousin, in whose favour the other candidates at once withdrew.

The aged ecclesiastic had grown from boyhood beside the Baron, until, on leaving the college of Debretzin, a passion for the cloister decided him on a conventional life ; and for several years he remained the quiet inmate of a monastic house : but when his foster-brother and patron retired from the court,

and resolved to pass the remainder of his days in his hereditary castle, he strongly urged him to procure a dispensation, and to reside under his roof. For a time he resolutely refused ; but after the lapse of a few months, the continued entreaties of his friend, and the yearnings of his own heart, became too powerful for resistance ; and he finally consented. The dispensation was procured ; and the amiable old man, whose partial seclusion appeared to have had no greater effect than that of enabling him to garner up all the kindest feelings of his nature in order that he might on his re-appearance in the world pour them forth lavishly upon every object around him, domesticated himself with the Baron. The simplicity of his mind and manners endeared him to all with whom he came in contact ; and there was almost poetry in the childish gushing out of his unsophisticated and unsuspecting spirit.

Probably no individual in the castle had listened with more intense delight to the national traditions which had been related by the Baron's guests than that simple-hearted old man ; and his aged eye grew bright for a moment with proud satisfaction at the respect which induced the young and the noble

to cede their privilege to his grey hairs. It was accordingly with a voice whose clear and honest cheerfulness rang blithely through the saloon, that after remarking that he had read the tradition he was now about to tell in an old manuscript in the convent library, he immediately commenced his tale.

THE BLOODY BANQUET.

The terrible war which threw Hungary in a great degree into the power of Boczkay, had lasted for three hundred weary years, when the treaty of Isitwa-Torok finally put an end to the fearful struggle after the demise of that prince, who died without issue, and determined the surrender of Transylvania to the Emperor Rudolph II.; but scarcely had this event occurred, when, influenced by the instigations and threats of the Turkish cabinet, the Transylvanian States proclaimed Sigismund Rákotzy as their sovereign.

The critical position of his country decided Rákotzy on accepting the dignity thus offered; but it was with a mental reservation; as, unambitious of the honour thrust upon him, he resolved to cede

the throne at the first fitting moment to his friend, Gabriel Báthory; a determination based on high and noble principle, but which proved fearfully injurious to the country that he loved, and to which he fondly believed that he had given a ruler more worthy than himself.

A spirit of renewed hope and confidence pervaded all Transylvania when Báthory assumed the sovereignty. It was, however, fated miserably to fail, for the golden days which were anticipated by the people, and which were to recompense them for their long and melancholy sufferings, were destined to become a time of torment and of terror.

Sordidly avaricious, Báthory no sooner felt himself secure upon the throne, than his extortions became so oppressive as to cause universal murmuring. In his anxiety to amass treasure, he disregarded the expostulations which assailed him on all sides; or, where he felt himself compelled to reply, he pleaded the necessity of paying a heavy tribute to Turkey—a reason which none who thoroughly understood his nature accepted for a moment.

The impoverished condition of the country had

rendered the extreme system of taxation which he adopted, vexatious and harassing, almost beyond endurance; and when to this evil was super-added a fierce and tyrannical disposition, that defied all restraint, and refused to recognise either the privileges or liberty of the subject, where they interfered with his selfish gratification or inordinate love of power, the most frightful anticipations replaced the hope which had greeted his accession.

As time wore on, Báthory became more and more the scourge of his ill-fated country. No Turkish despot could exceed him in arbitrary cruelty. He admitted no law, save his own will; no rule but his own pleasure; and where he met with opposition he unhesitatingly quenched it in blood: while, as if in order that no class of his subjects might escape suffering, he united to avarice and tyranny a sensuality so gross and uncompromising, that neither the brocade of the noble, nor the russet of the peasant, could secure their wearer from his unblushing profligacy.

These combined vices, united to the power of their indulgence, could not long be calmly endured,

even by a war-worn and exhausted people. The murmurs grew into loud complaint ; and, when this remained unheeded, deepened at last into resistance ; but all attempt was futile to restrain the evil impulses of Báthory, cradled into strength, as they had then become, by temporary submission, and each effort only entailed destruction upon its authors.

The tide ran on like that of a mighty river, which, polluted at its source, carried suffering and death upon its current ; blighting where it should have preserved, and withering where it should have nourished. The discontent was derided ; the resistance terminated by blood and torture ; and the success of this system so encouraged Báthory in his excesses, that ere long there remained scarcely a family throughout Transylvania to whose hearth he had not brought death or dishonour.

Then it was that the noble who had believed that his high birth and powerful influence, and the peasant who had hoped that his helplessness and insignificance, would have secured him from outrage, alike found their trust to have been vain ; that their sons and brothers had been slaughtered ; their wives and sisters become a mark for sorrow or

for scorn ; and the common suffering made with all ranks a common cause. Satisfied that of themselves they were powerless against their tyrant-prince, so long as he continued to be protected by the Turkish Sultan, it was resolved, in a council of the Barons, to dispatch an ambassador to Constantinople, who should be instructed to represent their grievances at the Sublime Porte, and to request the deposition of Báthory.

Informed by his spies of the step taken by the nobles, Báthory, on his side, lost no time in deputing an envoy to the same court, charged with his justification to the Sultan ; and he selected for this delicate mission Andrew Gétzy, a friend in whom he had great confidence ; and then, fearful of any longer trusting his personal safety to the very doubtful loyalty of the inhabitants of Klausenburg, he retired to his noble ancestral castle of Etzed to await the return of his messenger.

Nor was the precaution altogether needless, for the vicious prince was well aware of the attachment of his capital to Gabriel Béthlen, who had already, during a residence at Adrianople, succeeded in divorcing from his interests both the Grand Vēsir and the Mufti.

But to such a temper as his this species of self-imprisonment was a living death, to which he submitted with much the same patience and equanimity as a caged lion to his narrow den.

Jealous, at this particular crisis, of every one about him; and, like all tyrants, suspicious of even the most devoted of his creatures; the anxious sovereign was entirely thrown for counsel and companionship upon his sister, a princess not more renowned for her extreme personal beauty than for her haughty and vindictive disposition. Report, indeed, laid to her charge many of the atrocities of the detested Báthory; while it was certain, that even if guiltless of their suggestion, she was at least culpable in not exerting her unbounded influence over her brother, in order to check those cruelties which had deluged the land in tears.

To this congenial spirit, the self-exiled prince poured out his doubts, his projects, and his fears; and she listened alike to all; while by flattering his self-love, his ambition, and his cupidity, she soothed his wild and impetuous temper, and enabled him to support with less impatience the period of suspense and anxiety to which he had condemned himself.

Hour after hour of fierce and feverish excitement he had still, however, to endure, ere intelligence of his envoy could possibly reach Etzed; and with the assistance of his sister's society, and the indulgence of those vices which he could yet command within the castle, he bore up bravely, until he could no longer conceal from himself that the necessary time had elapsed, and that all further delay was suspicious, if not dangerous. Then, indeed, his passion would have way; and as he strode to and fro on the high ramparts, occasionally turning a long and searching look towards the eastern road by which his messenger must return, he gnawed his nether lip until blood mingled with the foam that gathered round his mouth; and the armed men who kept the walls trembled in their harness as he approached.

Vainly did he watch, and idly did the boiling blood fever upon his temples; for long after the appointed time had passed, day succeeded day, and week grew upon week, and still there came no message from the Moslem Court.

Autumn was on the wane; and the sear leaves of the forest which extended across the valley beneath the castle, were sailing in their wild mirth high in

air, as the long breath of the wind swept them from the branches ; and glistening beneath the sunlight in many varied shades of brown and yellow, or whirling in witch-circles upon the earth to the music of their own decay ; when as Báthory, stu-
pified by wine and wearied by suspense, was sleeping off the excesses of the evening banquet in his chair of state, at the head of the now-deserted board, a horrible outcry, accompanied by the sound of heavy blows, and the tumult of hurried steps, proceeding from the apartment of his sister, which was contiguous to the great hall where he had been feasting, aroused him from the stupor into which he had fallen. After having for a few seconds confused the uproar with the dark dream that had occupied his slumber, and into which these sounds of violence and disorder had merged themselves so naturally as to keep him still uncertain of their ac-
tual existence, he at length started from his seat ; and finally convinced by a piercing shriek in which he instantly recognised the voice of the princess, that it was indeed no delusion, he rushed to her assistance.

As he threw back the door of communication, the first peal of a frightful thunderstorm burst

immediately above his head, and seemed to rock the huge building to its very foundations; while by the glare of the lightning that flashed into the room, and whose fiery and forked tongue quivered and leapt for an instant among the weapons that hung upon the walls, he saw his stately sister surrounded by a crowd of ghostly forms, veiled and draped so closely that nothing could be defined save the fluttering of heavy garments, who were overwhelming her with weighty blows; while they kept up a wild and unearthly chorus, in which they enumerated all the frightful crimes of Báthory, to which she had been either the instigator or the accessory; and high above this uproar, to which it seemed a fitting counterpart, the tempest howled, and yelled, and shrieked about the castle.

In an instant the weapon of the Prince was in his hand, and he flung himself headlong among the aggressors, but his sword passed through them harmlessly; while in the next instant he was compelled to fly before a shower of stones, which were hurled from all sides with a violence that threatened his life.

As he fled from the room he heard a heavy fall: his sister had fainted from pain and terror; and

ere another moment had elapsed all was quiet, and no trace of the spectral visitants remained, save in the stones that were flung after the Prince, and which still lay scattered over the floor; but the horror of the household was by no means diminished, as, on gathering them up, they discovered that a blood-red cross was branded into each!

When she was restored to consciousness, the indignant passion of the Princess was terrible to contemplate. Far from believing, like her attendants, that her mysterious guests were supernatural beings, over whom human wrath could exert no power, she felt at once convinced that the hands by which she had been smitten were too surely hands of flesh; and every separate limb attested by its separate agony that no disembodied spirit had undertaken the work of vengeance.

Under these circumstances she called loudly on her brother for revenge, which he as loudly promised; but on whom it should be wreaked remained a mystery so dense, that none could hint at the aggressors; and thus, feeling her very existence painful until she should have sated her violence, even although it might be unjustly, she suddenly

turned upon the unwary attendants who were endeavouring to soothe her with the assurance that she had been visited by spirits of evil, with whom it were unsafe to meddle even in thought; and vowed that they who were toiling so perseveringly to pervert her judgment in order to screen the guilty parties, must be themselves the culprits.

Panic-stricken and trembling, the wretched creatures flung themselves at her feet, and protested their innocence; but words and tears alike availed nothing: the fiat had gone forth; and within an hour the dungeons of Etzed once more echoed back the groans and shrieks of the tortured and the dying.

Another week of suspense and passion went by, and still no light had been thrown upon the mysterious visitation; when one evening Báthory took his seat at the banquet, surrounded by the small circle of nobles whom interest or timidity had collected about him in his retirement. The chamberlain, according to custom, stood beside him ready to present the first dish; and the Prince was in the act of serving himself when he suddenly shrank back in his chair, and covering his eyes with his hands, exclaimed in an accent of disgustful horror:

"What means this? Who has dared to do this?
Why is my food covered with that bloody scarf?"

All around him either did not, or affected not to see anything unusual in the appearance of the dish; and after having ordered it to be removed from the hall, he became more tranquil, and desired that the repast might proceed. On its resumption, however, the appalling incident was re-acted; nor could any food be found which did not bear the same ensanguined shroud. The omen could not be mistaken; blood threatened the tyrant; and as this conviction forced itself upon him, he rose gloomily from his seat, and leaving the courtiers to revel as they might, retired to his apartment, where he remained for several days, invisible to every one save his sister and his immediate attendants.

When he again came forth, he was an altered man. The scowl of menace had left his brow; and the strong voice which had hitherto pealed out threatenings and violence, shook and sank as if subdued by some secret terror; while his dauntless daring, which had hitherto defied all laws both human and divine, had been replaced by a cowardice so abject, that he started and trembled at every

unusual noise; and surrounded himself by revel and light, that the horrors of darkness might be banished from his shrinking soul.

At length news came from the Moslem capital that his trusted messenger had betrayed him; and that Prince Gabriel Béthlen had been declared Sovereign of Transylvania by the Sultan, and was even now on his march to expel the coward-tyrant. Nor was there much time for deliberation; for the new monarch had already advanced into Servia, and crowds were flocking to his banners whom the bloody rule of Báthory had divorced from his interests. But the hour of passion and of pride was past. The deposed Prince did not even meditate resistance. He remembered the ghastly warning of the gory scarf: and hastily collecting together the most precious portions of his ill-gotten wealth, he fled in a covered carriage to Grosswardein; where he rushed upon the fate he sought to shun, and perished miserably beneath the steel of an assassin.

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